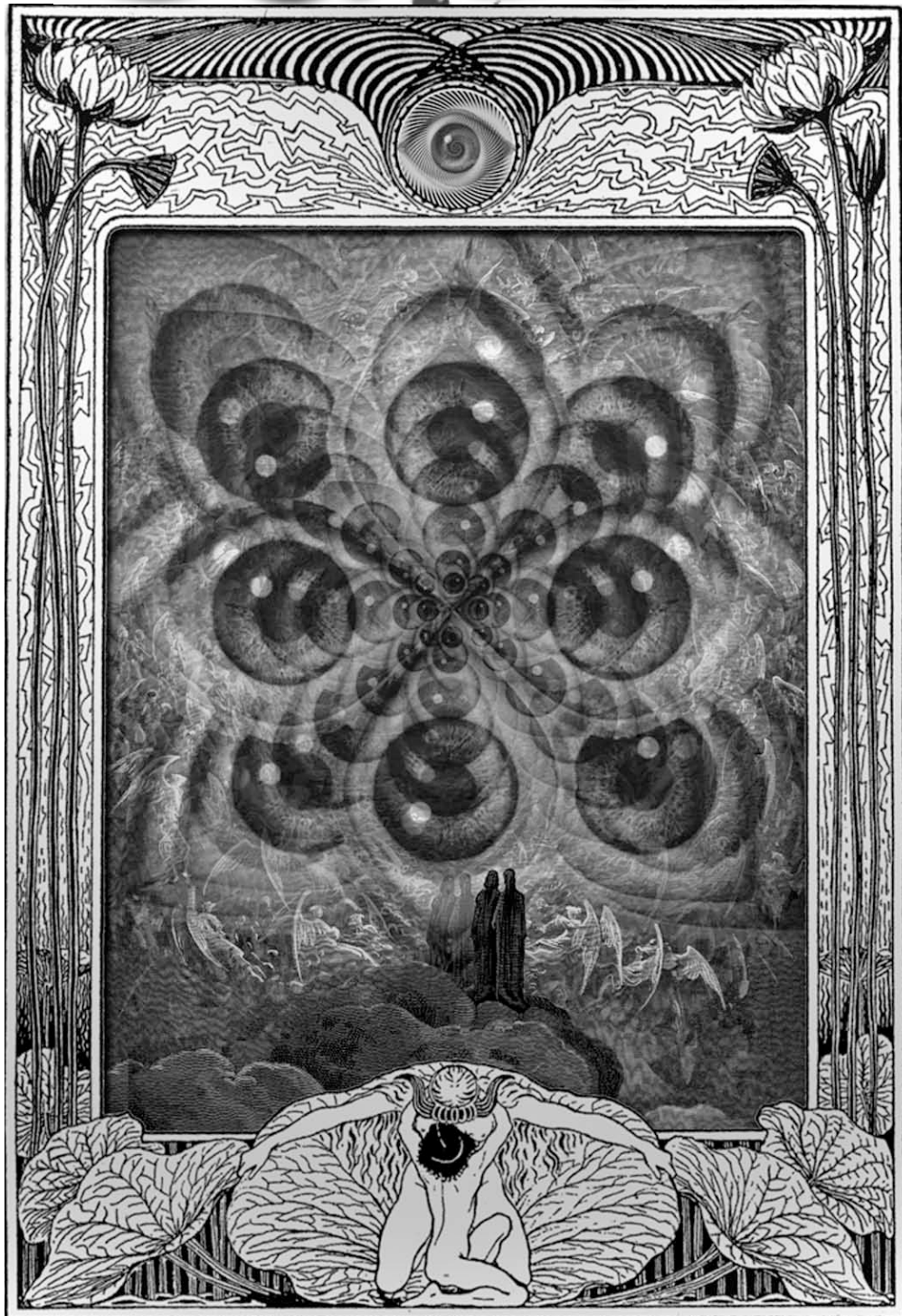
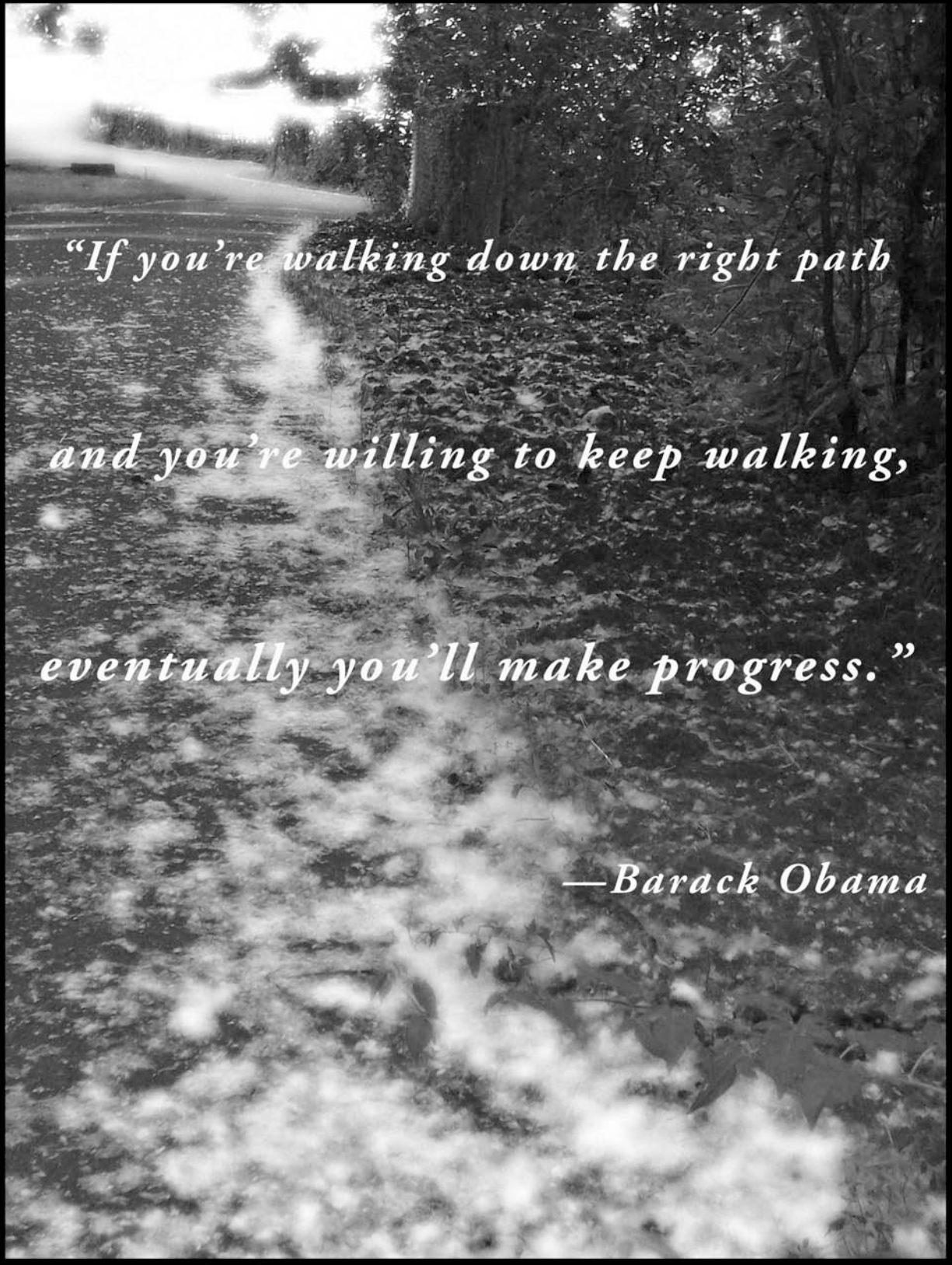


The Cenacle



Number 66 • October 2008



*“If you’re walking down the right path
and you’re willing to keep walking,
eventually you’ll make progress.”*

—Barack Obama

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September 17, 2008
10:11 p.m.
Jacob Bell, 21st Burnside,
my table
Portland, Oregon

Dear Jim,

Long stretch since last I wrote you,
& since then I've moved on from
Symantec Corp. the company that, in
hiring me, allowed my return to Portland,
this time with KD.

From last September til end of
June, I worked for them, paid well, a
pretty good job, I guess you could best
say I was a database manager & tech-
nical editor. Then, a Friday morning,
a phone call from my boss in Texas,
a perfunctory apology, & it was over.
The following Monday my last day &
there I was, jobless in Portland,
again, like back in 2002-2003 when
I lived here & had to leave.

All this summer I had to function
while still job-hungry. KD & I went on
preparing our No Borders Free Bookstore
to bring to the Portland Zine Symposium
(in abbreviated form) & to Burning Man

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2008. I got up every day to check my email, to look for jobs online, to wait that break by keeping at it. The daytime hours were hard; I wasn't earning money, though I was grateful for unemployment money. Not enough, but some. Not for very long, but for awhile.

Contract jobs, chances, came by email, but nothing resulted of any of the phone calls & possibilities. I wrote & re-wrote my resumé to fit one job or another better. I sat at Powell's Technical Bookstore learning new software tools to pimp up my chances.

Dull days, hard days, crumbling days. I went off to Burning Man with no sure prospects.

What the point here... something about persistence, about luck, about defending one's ground, about hours when heart & head fall to shit awhile, about scraping the shit off & resuming. About how much I newly hate that this society & most of the world operates by compelling a soul to perceive his or her worth based on external perception, & how rotten it is that the safety of every

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person in the world is not assured when it could be.

I'm employed again, as a technical writer, this time a small company, maybe more loyalty than anonymous bean-counters at Symantec.

To be laid off regardless of one's hard work or the value of one's job. Told, essentially, it didn't matter, you don't matter. Our bottom line matters more than you. You're cut loose because we need to survive & your paycheck is in our way. That's how it was. That's how it happens for so many. I was luckier than most in that they gave me a severance check, & I found a new job. I got through.

What then... a belief that humanity deserves no accolade for its evolution when still so many suffer, when countless hate & kill for abstract reasons, not survival. I feel grateful for my good luck yet only somewhat safer. This is a dangerous world. I learn this again & again. Especially the human world, its unpredictable turns toward kindness or cruelty.

[cont from
p. 33]

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September 22, 2008
5:52 p.m.
Carl's Jr., 5th & Taylor -
my table
Portland, Oregon

-Continue near a week later. Job has restored much stability ~~lost~~, though I look at the American financial markets, near collapse, & I shudder. Most of us live lives ~~never~~ ^{never} very far from insolvency, never know wealth or genuine financial ease. ~~We~~ Laden with credit cards, loan payments, rents or mortgages, health insurance, the daily costs of groceries & transit utility bills, clothes, taxes, on & on - most of us are wage slaves who at best earn a handful of days away every year to beat back some of the weariness we never fully shake.

We are defined by our jobs, our economic function, not who each of us is, but what each of us does. Those without work in this society are virtually without identity. Those who perform the so-called menial jobs, usually low-paying service sector

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jobs, are regarded as lesser persons. We pay millions to actors & musicians & athletes & politicians because they perform their functions in public - give them bloated adulation - since only a few are truly gifted - the only catch being the ongoing delight millions take in watching some of those on high fall fast & loud.

Will this ever go away? I don't think so. I think the price to pay for a heterogeneous market-based society is the profound way in which individuals are pitted against one another - the way religion & race & gender & geography & ethnicity & so on divide one against another - define & divide - produce countless conflicting ideas on what essentially defines Americans foremost.

I wish I could now elaborate my solution. I have none. Found a country with ideas about individual liberty, the result ~~will~~ will be millions of individuals with various ideas about what this means. Maybe the best one can do is fervent tolerance in

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one's views & behavior. How this would work for Ku Klux Klansmen, ~~Domination~~ Dominionist Christians, hardcore Vegans, & the like, I don't know.

All I seem to know is that I'm not convinced anybody has the answer, though many claim to. I walked around this summer beset by all this I am describing the feeling that I was less a person for being jobless, the countless claims to truth "Truth" for believers of whatever stripe, the fears that expenses & bills & debts raise high when one has a thinning wallet. I'm employed again, & very grateful, yet I haven't forgotten.

Best I can do is preach the seeming power of perseverance, & my faith that the Universe does shift this way & that by one's effort. Knowable, controllable? I doubt this, while not being sure. At best I bear a faith that despair & paralysis are most often least among options.

Maybe I simply prefer the mystery to any solution I've yet heard offered. Any explanation. But I'll admit that at least sometimes I'm still listening. O & ♥, 9-22-2008



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PORTLAND, OREGON



SCRIPTOR PRESS

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Thanks to PY for ending my summer-long job-hunting nightmare by offering me decent work . . . to the contributors to this periodical who made these recent months a more bearable time for KD and me . . . and to Senator Barack Obama, who has offered a calm, engaged perspective on the world’s crises, giving millions the hope that we can solve the problems we caused . . . hope of better days is a powerful thing, indeed . . .



Daniel Schroyer



Listening to Bombs

i'm not faithless
and
neither are they

heroes?
terrorists?
who knows?

peace begins with forgiveness
not finding
but creating

like mornings each
its own package
unwrapping
just born light
listen
the birds know

i name this epiphany
unfolding
not so slowly
now that time
knows me
so intimately

i wish to share
this opening
this understanding

here are my hands
my heart

i am
for mending

I Am Building

listen i am building
a house of poetry

word by word
line by line
windows and doors
stairs both up and down
and long hallways leading
everywhere
i haven't yet been or named

listen to my hammering
how the verbs
who the nouns
sound

every room a well lighted
place your trust
in language
it's how we think
how we pray

and god said
though
i can't recall
what

it was i have faith
his word(s)

i'm building a house of poetry
and it ain't no church
or bible

but
god how it means
when you define
your faith so personally

My Just Wildness

i immersed
myself
in the liquid
hour
before dawn

slowly
awakening
not from sleep
but
from the long
thin
darkness

where i had
become
feral by choice

laying down civilization
an atrocity
at a time
my just wildness
a simplicity of shoes
slowing destruction
one
step
 at a time

She Spreads a Red Shadow

she spreads
a red
shadow

moves with the awkward
grace of the lefthanded

among her possessions
sunbleached bird's bones
empty nests
dreams of flight

her faith
designed upon
the lesser gods

she speaks of war
but not the battlefields

how she learned
the secrets of fear
how some men
never recover
and
why they could
not sleep
together

she awoke
rose
lighted
a votive candle

spreads
a red
shadow
upon his cherished
absence.

G.C. Dillon



Ten Thousand Spoons When All You Need Is A Knife

Desi Costello ran into work, rushed to the register, and began to punch her ID into the keyboard in order to clock in. Marisol, her shift supervisor, stood next to her.

“You know you are supposed to be ready to work when you punch in.”

“I know, I know,” Desi replied, and began twisting a ponytail holder around her long, black hair. “But the bus was running late. It’s not my fault.” She pushed her small, octal-shaped glasses back upon her nose.

“Yeah, but Laurie’s still here. Get your apron on and hurry.” Laurie was the store manager.

“She’s here. Still?” Desi’s nose wrinkled and her eyebrows furrowed.

“Quarterly paperwork, I think. Or she’s having a fight with her husband and doesn’t want to go home.”

Speak of Shiva, and Shiva appears—Laurie came out of the backroom, a stack of papers in her left hand and a *giganto* sized in-house cup of coffee in her right. “Where’s Bob?” she asked. “I’m going to kill him.”

We can’t blame it all on Bob, Desi thought, *though we do try.*

“I know this sounds like makework,” Laurie said, “but some company accountant wants an inventory count every year. And Bob! He can’t just make up numbers wily nilly. I have to answer for these figures.”

“Why? What’s the problem?” Marisol questioned.

“We have more spoons than we’ve ever ordered.”

What is the accelerated depreciation on a spoon? Desi wondered.

“That can’t be right. I mean people aren’t bringing in their own spoons and leaving ‘em for us.”

“Why do we even have spoons?” Desi asked. “Not just plastic stirrers?”

“Real spoons are more **Green**. It’s part of the socially minded life style our guests enjoy here at **Café du Jour**,” Laurie stated.

“Except for all the hot water we use to fill the massive power wash sink,” Desi added.

Marisol’s eyes told her to keep quiet.

“I’m on Drive-Thru?” Slipping the headset over her head, Desi said, “Welcome to **Café du Jour**. How may I take your order?”

At closing, it was just Marisol and Desi. Desi was getting a ride from her co-worker, and though she wanted to leave, she waited while Marisol had her last cigarette of the night.

They settled onto the tiled floor of the coffee shop's office. Desi's left foot became entangled in the cat's cradle of computer cables that snaked under the desk.

"Spare a cigarette?"

"I thought you quit."

"I'm quitting unless I have to stay up all night. *Cigaritto por favor.*"

Marisol passed one over. Marisol was pretty much dedicated to the job when on the clock, but she became chatty when the work was done.

"I felt like such a witch," Marisol confessed. She and Desi sat just beyond the aegis of the security system's view. Desi's eyes strayed to the flat screen monitor. The security camera showed them a dark yet still clear view of their dining area. The pale illumination streamed in from the lights of the parking lot that the store shared with other stores in the mall.

"I was showing a new hire around. We came to the daily use bins, and I asked him to sweep up all the coffee beans that were on the floor. You know from the broken bags and all . . ."

"Yeah, we get a lot of them. More than statistical probability should allow for."

"So he put the beans from the floor back into one of the bins. I lost it. I screamed, 'What are you doing!' So I made a new rule: if it's on the floor, it goes in the trash."

"There! There. What was that?" Desi asked. Marisol ceased the recounting of her story, and looked to the monitor.

"Nothing. It was a spot on the screen. Could even have been a fly."

"No, it was something. This time it's not just a fly. Let's go." Desi pushed herself off the office floor, and ran for the dining area. She flicked on the lights. And . . .

The *something* stood by the condiment bar.

"G'Day mate. Or nite since you're antipodean," it said. It was ugly, brutal, and short. Long pointed ears swung like bats' wings from its head. Prickly fur covered its body. It smiled through large carnivorous teeth and fangs.

"What was in that cigarette?" Marisol said.

"What are you?" asked Desi.

"I'm a Gremlin."

"Like in *The Twilight Zone*? But what are you doing here?"

"Oh a little mischief. Have to sabotage your coffee bags to spill all over the floor. I've done a few other things 'round here that I like to check up on, too. Such as the fact that your town name prints out wrong on the receipts?"

"My God! It's Palinfeld, not Plainfield. He—it's right."

"And to deliver a supply of spoons, of course. These are from Melbourne. Oh! You should see the utensils from Adelaide."

"Spoons?" Desi sputtered. "Why are you leaving spoons here?"

"Where am I to be putting 'em? A pot o' spoons at the end of the rainbow!"

"Why do you have to be so rude?"

"I'm a Gremlin, sugar bosoms. We ain't nice. Just ask Shatner and Lithgow."

"Okay, now I know I'm offended."

"Took you long enough, sweet lips. Look, I know, it's a let down from the stuff I did in the past. I had a great career, drinking motor oil and antifreeze from combat squadrons and WWI flying circuses. Why once I caused a Qantas passenger plane's cargo doors open

and spill everyone's luggage across the tarmac at take-off. They were picking up bras for months in Sydney.

"But a Gremlin does what a Gremlin can. A torn bag here, a missing spoon there, Windows Vista . . ." The creature's eyes grew red as it stared at the brunette. "Say, you are a nice *Sheila*."

I don't know what that means, but I don't like the sound of it, Desi thought.

Desi lifted her middle finger. "I like you," the creature said, guffawing.

"I've a memory geas about me someplace. Oh, yes. You won't remember anything tomorrow."

Desi Costello rushed into work. The bus was late again. She paused at the Condiment Bar.

She glanced at the napkins embossed with the company logo, ran her hand along the packets of sugar, sugar substitute, and honey. But she stopped at the small cup for the spoons. It was overflowing. Again. She picked up two of them. *The company could at least buy the same design*, she thought. *I know times are tough, but did they get these at a garage sale?*

No!—there was *something* about where the spoons came from . . . Something she couldn't recall clearly.

"Hey," yelled Marisol, "time to punch in."



Victor Vanek



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Many Musics

(Third Series)

*"Out here on the perimeter
there are no stars*

Out here we is stoned . . . immaculate"

—The Doors, "The Wasp (Texas Radio & the Big Beat)," 1971.

i. Manifest

What won't come is music half-called,
distracted, hungry hours, sunk in the province
of men. Lights, simmering smells, bread & stew.
Lure, of wine & silk. Someone nods & says
we're mapping beauty, a hour nearer, a formula,
derived of striplings' coos & closely tuned
compass. More smoke, distraction's distraction.
Maybe the potion drunk an hour ago will able save the next.

Music half-called rings back in blind cries &
smoking metal. Sentiments & easy lusts.
Mapping beauty? another says. We can't feed
ourselves & save the trees alike. What beauty
in a hungry child or a burnt acre? Legions
of men will be needed, maybe more than all
this world holds. Legions of men & centuries
of days before anything known, or we even begin.

Music, I call you now, from what I know
& much the rest, I call you now, music,
where you tend I will follow, what you
know I will believe. By star's light &
dream glow will I map beauty, in songs
to manifest, music, I call to you now.
Each drift on his breeze, one wind, many winds,
one rhythm, one melody, many musics, hear my vow.

ii. Passing Water

Sing the hours true & know the hunger
 is bound in breathing itself, its walls,
 beams, what girds underneath. Breeze moves
 each & all, one wind, many, & rains
 fall with the ceaseless questions & some
 answer. Want born, roots, thus musics bloom.

Next hill may show whatever the burning
 smell in the air, or within heart's bluest
 scent itself, or where bound world's greater
 arc half risen. Sing the hours true,
 chop wood, carry water, reckon every hour's
 pulse of promise & ache, what stays, what going.

Ferment & strew, drifting lash on a curved
 warmth, news of today's annihilation in
 god's praise. Crack the wish to notice newly,
 the long remembered page's lean wisdom,
 dream's luring distant treeline. Every heart blows
 through empty fields with obscure intent.

World manifests in you for its own reasons,
 many, & none at all.

iii. Penury

World evolves an hour to a train's slow
 through grassland carrying new dead,
 to a long-awaited kiss in rainy light.
 Music half-called, deep hungry words,
 clear dreams of a dying man. A soldier
 cursing the strange land's heat, his own sad blood.

What to do next when the wind &
 the lightning & the rainbow & the shutting
 door? Any of it. What to do next?
 Say the way is dis-illusion, call world
 an effect, crack that wish to notice
 newly? Manifest. Shit is beautiful too.

Look onto new years, their clustered
 seeds, unmet faces, chances brambled
 in mystery. Eternals touched in finishing
 the song, & crawling the dust. Look back,
 bravely, what spillt, what gone, calmly,
 what lingers & what still it seeks through you.

iv. Clean

Leaves everywhere shake & I understand:
 I know nothing.
 Trees above drink of earth & shine alike:
 I am nobody.
 Human paths through hills & bushes decaying
 the moment the pick draws away:
 This hour is a gift to all & my sadness
 is the struggle to share.

What answer is a tapping in our cells,
 a deep rhythm, source of knowing &
 nothing, move nearer, no why, move
 on, sing, trust.

What answer in godless hands that
 can shape dust to bullet & thus back
 again, or shape dust to a prayer of thanks,
 manifest a star in every seeking eye.

Leaves are shaking harder now, everywhere,
 a language of both knowing & nothing,
 a pickless path, this hour's gift both
 spent & unspending. Move nearer
 the deep rhythm, sing, trust, move on.
 No why & there never was.

v. Viva La Vida

Fear falls frozen dripping through
 the heart, one & many wonder at
 its breathless wall, its lump of god within.
 How alone & why? Ask again. The cicadas
 & bamboo too? Ancient astronauts taught
 us this far & left, nodded, let go?

Want, taught to want, to feed one hunger
 with another, to chase, to almost know,
 hurry toward those brilliant years, sensuous
 playing lights. Sabre tooth & bronts not
 withstanding. Hunger, is it more complex
 with more men, larger cities? Does any
 who falls tonight triumph in finale,
 glory for not an hour more?

Fear falls, frozen, dripping through the heart,
 great galleries & long centuries,
 preachers roar & kings thump. Comfort in
 hovering together close over the abyss, align gazes
 & call it love, or gesture to maps & libraries,
 bullets, chalice, scripture, grave, solemn
 nod their truth? Comfort in what hasn't
 slipped yet & touchless faith it will hold.

Questions mirror glance to glance, & highest
 music only sighs & sings of full moons,
 midnight tides, & the moment's power
 in warmth laying by warmth. Tonight
 behold the wide world with all its fears,
 howling & half-awake, no key to explain.
 Behold the world, howling, half waking,
 yet still no key to the smallest face or least star.

vi. Insurgo (6/19/08)

Old thoughts crowd the peak, obscure
 both sky & valley. The years conspire
 to narrow faith, harden & systematize
 what it becomes. Worshipped words without
 burn. How long stable this living machine?
 Look to how dear men bear the crumble
 of other centuries, & yet little reck
 its warning. Old thoughts, on a familiar
 train crossing a local river, some factory
 crowds its edge. I witness this passing
 hour in nod to its sky, its valley,
 what treasure it keeps, what it passes along.

vii. Distant

Brave, bastardly brave, stupidly brave,
 happily brave, let the countless musics
 within bloom. Break narrow faith &
 dreams of burning landscapes, win or lose
 by what matters, struggle to share, & share.
 Blowing scarce tonight, I pledge to my
 returning tide, & what fineness still waits.

viii. A Night's Raw Lyric

Sniff the fecund world from a hid,
 ordinary place. Sniff its noise, an art,
 a statecraft, the intense light draping
 a high, hungry color. Sniff the lies
 in calling the stars a heaven, in
 praising what buries in earth as
 carcass, as remain. Sniff the world's
 constant hungers, drying here, new
 wetting up there. The world awful
 with its making scents, where kind &
 fine, where cruel, where flesh wilds
 for flesh & not a coin, not a king,
 not a god in any skies despite.

ix. Plumage

The world downs every man, one day,
 some year. Slinking hours at a distance,
 a smile in gauze, the trembling talk
 of books. What fineness in hungers lost,
 streets where shoulders knocked with
 high plans, moon an ally, dawn's fresh page.

The years drown in watching the world
 hustle many charms & lies, arguments
 for answers, the blunt lure of flesh
 for plumage, the driving, wild wish
 for warmth. Drinking hours at a distance,
 still wanting after what they didn't reveal.

Tonight, again, I know nothing. I am
 nobody. Singing to manifest, crawling
 the dust. Study the web, pray the hours.
 Watch one man in a doorway guard his
 plastic bags, thrown a coin by a couple
 sparkling wetly with drink & easy thoughts
 of silked mirrors, cuffs & cocaine, stereo moans.

Watch another fall from his seat,
 others notice, flashing lights arrive.
 Stumbled out to the curb, slumps with
 a cigarette til a van & kind voice arrives.
 Hours since: another man shovels in cheap
 food where that one went down. Despair.

Tonight I still beat at narrow faith,
 at vows thin of mystery & pleasure.
 I am reaching for the hungrier words,
 to sing, to burn, to reveal. New sounds
 of the sea in my blood, next page,
 the way on. Tonight I will not drown.

x. Twined Paths

Hope honey me again tonight, crush
 between tips then fling me seeds
 to the shadow & breeze—

The cafes & the woods are same for
 the chase I keep, toward answers
 that murmur & raise—

a travel past the hustle of a man's
 deepest lies made law, music & tragedy
 of a laughing boozy half-harnessed tit—

Hope hunger me again tonight, press
 toward one stream these hard-twined paths,
 answers to release the beast & explain the blow.

xi. Prayer

Night flashes through me, an anxious
 traffic, among human spillage from taverns,
 raw from hours begging men for needs.
 Dreams to come of hawks high on
 empty arroyos, & babies a soft mystery
 in my arms, of tomorrow's fractured news.

Universe, I am asking again for help,
 & strength, for the best of what's left in me.

xii. Kryptos

Where the strength to elude the Beast
 & win the hour? Mend fractured wishes
 into Beauty, slip through heart's hungry
 maze, blow up in new song? Neither
 slave to a passing struggle nor a helpless
 moan blaming coin, king, & cunt for defeat?

World blooms through wars, through every
 flesh's cry & fall. Blooms, waits, invites
 each & all. Through the hours won, lost,
 & abandoned, world blooms, open hand,
 a wish for each, no matter what
 I am, no matter what you are.

xiii. One Song

Someone sang, "Knowledge sums endless,
wisdom ever gives way." He pointed
to the countless drummers & their dancers
crying up the dust. Nodded, sang again,
just a word, "Beguiled," & fell into the storm.

As I followed him into the desert, &
then ceased to follow, the songs left me
slowly, the apologies, the love chants,
the cries against crown & preacher.

As I ceased to follow, & ceased to look
apart from stars & mountains & ground,
I also ceased to care for the little mantras
of man, let them go a flake at a time:

"Peace brings more rewards than war
ever could." "Love over money."
"Power handled with caution, always
looking at its effects." "Nationhood
a comfort, not an ideology." "The world
does not belong to men & women,
but we belong to each other."

What remained, what I am, having
ceased, what is until all is not,
is one song, sung by every man & woman,
every rock & tree, every planet & star,
every insect, virus, alien, ant, & whorl,
everything everywhere, one song,
I am coming in an unknown hour,
I am singing every hour until then.

xiv. Sacred Trash

High on labyrinth
 endless desert
 to go

xv. Paucity

That dirtbag room in her lunatic house
 where I sat by TV with a dish of
 warm cheap food & a torrid crumbling wish.
 Fate took its time, relaxed silent by
 those many hours that I writhed.
 Amid my hard wants, savage musics bloomed.

Whether yearn for a coupling or a coin,
 the din of days is the tapping of a heart's
 empty bowl for notice, for some token
 it can keep, some pittance will survive
 its miles, swathe its nights, complete
 old promises of dear forgotten faces spoke
 roughly on autumn benches in far gone parks.

xvi. Rant

Amid this curtained savagery, the lies
 explained as loyalty, discarding the man
 to keep the idea, the hunger for orgasm
 even a full moon cannot sate & Art
 will not explain, & tradition the praising
 of today's shit because it smells like another's—

How the spirit moves caged in a book
 read from a pulpit by a man who dreams
 of adding his come to the flames burning
 down the heathens' village—

Brave talk of God's love as a mystery
 not a bondage. Brave talk of the world
 as gift & game enough for all.
 Brave talk of another in question &
 early morning curiosity. Tell me
 of a hope that does not rest dependent
 on another, or a despair that cannot
 be cut with a touch, a barking, hungry
 persistent word of empathy. Love's long
 blind reach into the dark.

xvii. Many Moons

If a dream of many moons in the sky,
 what else then? What more than sitting in
 festive groups staring one another for the
 hour's favorite quip? What not men among
 the roots? What new stars among ceaseless
 lonely want to fertilize the world with more?

Many moons in the sky, in dreams &
 otherwise. More than celestial formulas
 or a guru's solemn named day, else than
 the heated bestial grunts of age picking over
 youth's glinting bits. Waiting the foothold
 more luring than a new lover's thoughtful
 recline among shadows. The first word
 of the song stars know better than men.

xviii. After Embrace

I watched them each part a life
 as he walked across the street &
 she hurried down the sidewalk.
 Neither looked back, as though that easy.

xix. A Fable

A man smiled & leaned against another
 man, said, "this is my land, brother,
 but I'll hire you to work it for me."
 The second man heard his baby crying
 & checked his options, none. Asked his pay.

No freedom in working another man's
 land as he counts. Nor freedom in
 striking him down. Freedom not found
 in a coin or a crown or a cross.
 Freedom's hour come when none above, none below.

xx. Love Song (for K.)

What remains of the years I sing
 & call my Art. What salves my
 suffering or sets it to a softer tune—

The need to fuck, the need to piss,
 the breathing, the beating, the fury
 toward what beauty these autumnal hours—

And love, I can only think, is how
 my music protects & calms your nights
 when I cannot do this for all.

xxi. Downtown Lights

When the dead return in dreams,
helpless, breathless—or the lost lover,
never was a goodbye, a thank you,
a shared nod of failure—

But there was my father, taxiing me
to kin, & here I was in the back seat,
complaining I'd forgotten my notebooks—
& again was that lover, left to me
a dictionary marked with cryptic directions
to reach her, reach back to her—

He's awhile now dead in the ground,
she's even longer dead in my heart,
yet reck this hour's ink spending slave
to each, heart's deep bruises beating
this music in me, squeezing me out
as once his loins squeezed me out too,
as once I cried & squeezed within her,
till heat ran cold, & earth drank piss & blood.

xxii. Autumnal Fancy

Sage cry the truth & tend it,
 you're traveling away from its moment,
 now, & still. Feel it drown on the shore,
 feel each new hour huddle near, chew at it,
 its light crackling apart, but what
 you knew, how sure! How sure!
 And tell, tell, none need suffer without
 explain again. Feel it going, even as
 you tell others among the oaks, even as
 you shape your speeches & songs. Going,
 every day, wake up, it's going, let it,
 it fed that hour, sated it, bloomed
 that hour with hope, let it settle among
 the rest in your heart, let it relax from
 truth to faith, now a breath, maybe two,
 what's left not sentiment let abide.

xxiii. The Midnight Cry

Tis said the beast's beneath the bricks,
 waiting night or distraction or an elixir's
 flash of something hungry—
 Tis said the erotic coil's tight & getting
 tighter, now what will make it burst?
 Tis said civilization's built, trembling, on
 ruins & bones, breathes & drinks with ghosts.

Tis expected, by many, this world of men
 will fall to a bomb some god's minions
 will—or rise to another god's return—
 it won't last, however the end, at best
 a smiling recall to the stars, beauteous hour!

We do not know, Universe, our flesh hungers
 for each other, for light, for music,
 for answers. We do not know, our hopes
 cloak pretty on the beast's shoulder, our fears
 that the beast is all we really are.

xxiv. Hereafter

I'll be the hungry ghost returned to snap
 at clusters of tight skirts, snap till I hear
 one who laughs & wants more, snap till
 she cries out, till she's urging the rest—

Or the clustered thorn in the preacher's
 golden costume, now burbling, now biting when
 he speaks smoothly of God's mystery & suffering,
 cramp his holy thighs when he lusts, when he loathes—

When the king raises his fist smiling,
 would command not just armies of men
 & machines but the woods, the tides,
 the moon itself, I'll blind him a moment
 & give his tongue a heated taste of his own shit—

When one man leans on another, measures
 the world's worth in coin & commodity, when
 he sharpens others to reck him with quickening breath,
 I'll crumble his ankle & whither his cock—

When the lusty crowd densens round a single
 helpless face, moves in with noose or cuffs,
 I'll sweat each one with panic, choke,
 & tomorrow *your* door, tomorrow *it will be you*—

Lastly the child, with her new breast
 blooming, with his questions shuffled toward
 thick books & stained glass, I will spend
 the last of me scrawling over young hearts:

“Nobody knows all! Believe, with every window open!”

xxv. Stench of Duende

It was in that cash-only motel room,
 those furthest hours when I undressed you,
 as others had, love was fucking’s residue,
 your young body long trained to be taken,
 to clash & lick sinews for hearts, it would
 hurt a little but he would say *it*, & I sighed
 & held you lightly, for all the devils & violence
 that had led you blithely to my arms,
 & would retrieve you again by morning.

xxvi. Vintage Falls

World for consumption or partner,
 gorge or feed? Best send a camera
 or a blueprint into the wild to know it?
 More gain in spearing salmon for trade
 or squeezing the river’s roar into a lit room?

There are angles in this world that cannot
 be braided into use, secret chiaroscuros
 of morning, an empty shore, a quiet water,
 down river a mile the remaining bones
 of a drowned woods, in the vague air
 an unhuman language croons from ten centuries passed.

xxvii. Distraction

If a preacher's wily words of other worlds
 or a fine ass on an evening avenue distract,
 if the taste of meat or chocolate, if a snowy
 wind thrilling every tree in pathless woods,
 if the sight of a fallen creature on an empty
 road, broken & going yet blindly breathing
 on, if the stars weightless & some say
 portending, if the remembered laugh
 of a loved one known only in earliest youth,
 if dreams drowning in sand, & those
 when earth is impossibly viewed from above,
 if the preacher's blithe promise of someday's
 answer for today's kneel & obey, if the rest
 matches in soulful beauty that fine, fine
 ass, what then otherwise was the reason
 for arriving to this hour, you & I, the world
 blood-wracked to blue, what was the reason?

xxviii. Breath Bewitching

What diminishes, in some hours,
 is not just the want to know,
 but the faith anything can be known,
 answer not fruited of hustle or delusion,
 the questions asked the skies on worst nights,
 & those glints nearly touched on others,
 can sum, manifest, fold the world
 at last gently open, & what seemed
 random horror of chance & limited view
 will reveal finely in music, a mystery
 more beautiful because made plain.

xxix. Song to a Stranger

Some other night you would have moved
 me, did, as I sat lone & wanting,
 in nocturnal cafes where sugar rushed
 my hungry pages, below stars that
 could explain you no better than else,
 in dreams where your auburn hair
 would come undone & I would lose
 within your body what my last hour
 will never know in your heart.

xxx. A Lesson in Power

In the taking of a kingdom or a heart,
 a beast for its meat or seed for its fruit,
 there is a push, a breath, an acquiesce,
 one world coming, another one gone.
 A feed in victory by stars & firelight.

In the release again there is loss,
 for how her body tasted that mountainside
 afternoon, for how thousands once
 bowed to a flag, its ideas triumphant
 by gunpoint. A silence, a burial in breath.

Derive this lesson, then: neither
 the take nor the release will last,
 & whatever drinks of power's thunder
 tonight will crest again fallow another.
 What carries the years neither king nor kingdom.
 What carries not the singer nor the song.



To be continued in Cenacle | 67 | December 2008

WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES FROM THE PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION

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Mother Sea: The Gray Beginnings

excerpt from *The Sea Around Us* (1950, 1951, 1961)

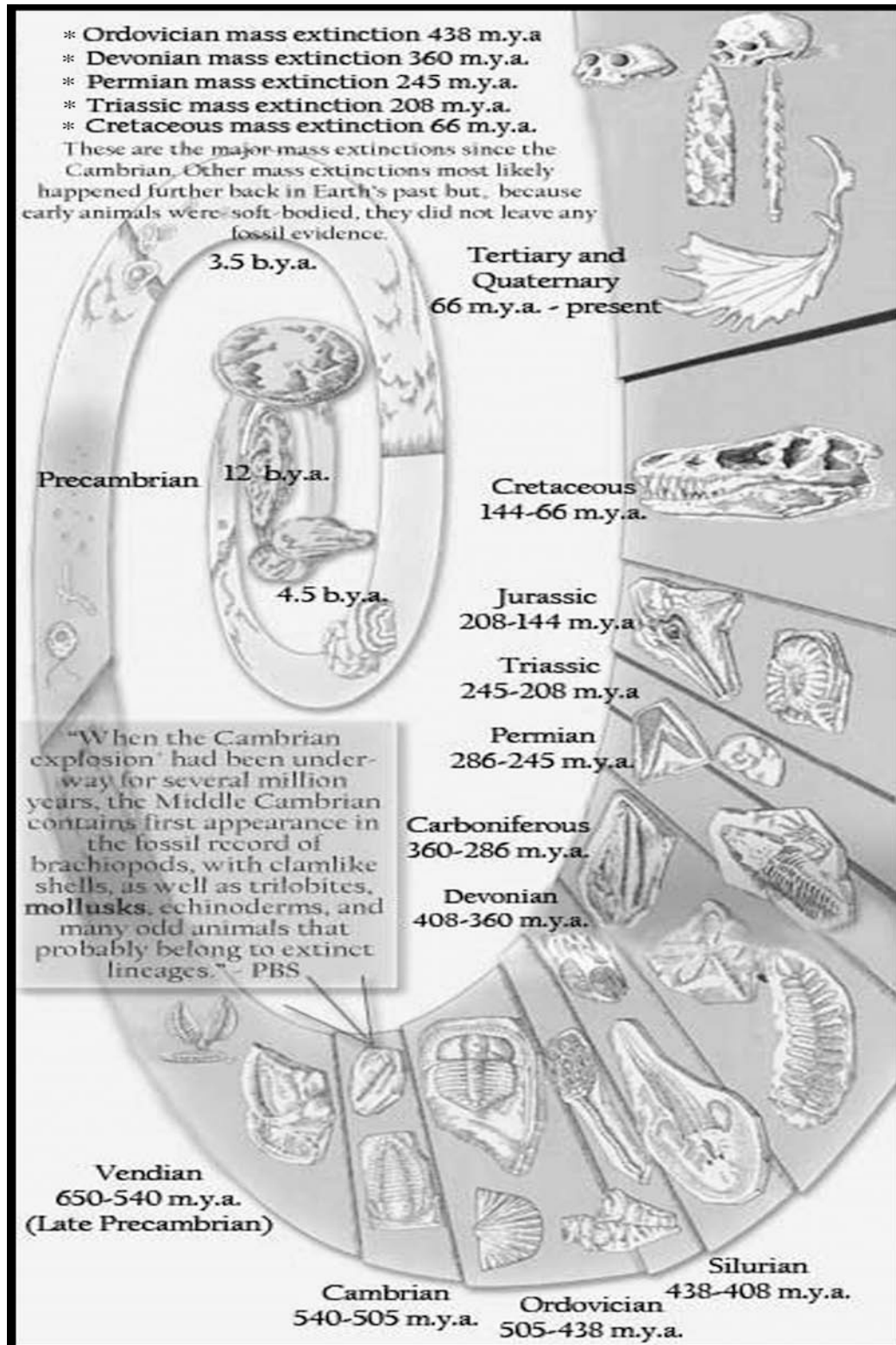
*And the Earth was without form, and void;
and Darkness was upon the face of the Deep.*

—Genesis

Beginnings are apt to be shadowy, and so it is with the beginnings of that great mother of life, the sea. Many people have debated how and when the earth got its ocean, and it is not surprising that their explanations do not always agree. For the plain and inescapable truth is that no one was there to see and, in the absence of eyewitness accounts, there is bound to be a certain amount of disagreement. So if I tell here the story of how the young planet Earth acquired an ocean, it must be a story pieced together from many sources and containing whole chapters the details of which we can only imagine. The story is founded on the testimony of the earth's most ancient rocks, which were young when the earth was young; on other evidence written on the face of the earth's satellite, the moon; and on hints contained in the history of the sun and the whole universe of star-filled space. For although no man was there to witness this cosmic birth, the stars and moon and the rocks were there and, indeed, had much to do with the fact that there is an ocean.

The events of which I write must have occurred somewhat more than 2 billion years ago. As nearly as science can tell, that is the approximate age of the earth, and the ocean must be very nearly as old. It is possible now to discover the age of the rocks that compose the crust of the earth by measuring the rate of decay of the radioactive materials they contain. The oldest rocks found anywhere on earth—in Manitoba—are about 2.3 billion years old. Allowing 100 million years or so for the cooling of the earth's materials to form a rocky crust, we arrive at the supposition that the tempestuous and violent events connected with our planet's birth occurred nearly 2 billion years ago. But this is only a minimum estimate, for rocks indicating an even greater age may be found at any time.

The new earth, freshly torn from its parent sun, was a ball of whirling gases, intensely hot, rushing through the black spaces of the universe on a path and at a speed controlled by immense forces. Gradually the ball of flaming gases cooled. The gases began to liquefy, and Earth became a molten mass. The materials of this mass eventually became sorted out in a definite pattern: the heaviest in the center, the less heavy surrounding them, and the least heavy forming the outer rim. This is the pattern which persists today—a central sphere of molten iron, very nearly as hot as it was 2 billion years ago, an intermediate sphere of semiplastic basalt, and a hard outer shell, relatively quite thin and composed of solid basalt and granite.



The outer shell of the young earth must have been a good many millions of years changing from the liquid to the solid state, and it is believed that, before this change was completed, an event of the greatest importance took place—the formation of the moon. The next time you stand on a beach at night, watching the moon's bright path across the water, and conscious of the moon-drawn tides, remember that the moon itself may have been born of a great tidal wave of earthly substance, torn off into space. And remember that if the moon was formed in this fashion, the event may have had much to do with shaping the ocean basins and the continents as we know them.

There were tides in the new earth, long before there was an ocean. In response to the pull of the sun, the molten liquids of the earth's whole surface rose in tides that rolled unhindered around the globe, and only gradually slackened and diminished as the earthly shell cooled, congealed, and hardened. Those who believe that the moon is a child of Earth say that during an early state of the earth's development something happened that caused this rolling, viscid tide to gather speed and momentum and rise to unimaginable heights. Apparently the force that created these greatest tides the earth has ever known was the force of resonance, for at this time the period of the solar tides had come to approach, then equal, the period of the free oscillation of the liquid earth. And so every sun tide was given increased momentum by the push of the earth's oscillation, and each of the twice-daily tides was larger than the one before it. Physicists have calculated that, after 500 years of such monstrous, steadily increasing tides, those on the side toward the sun became too high for stability, and a great wave was torn away and hurled into space. But immediately, of course, the newly created satellite became subject to physical laws that sent it spinning in an orbit of its own about the earth. This is what we call the moon.

There are reasons for believing that this event took place after the earth's crust had become slightly hardened, instead of during its partly liquid state. There is to this day a great scar on the surface of the globe. This scar or depression holds the Pacific Ocean. According to some geophysicists, the floor of the Pacific is composed of basalt, the substance of the earth's middle layer, while all other oceans are floored with a thin layer of granite, which makes up most of the earth's outer layer. We immediately wonder what became of the Pacific's granite covering and the most convenient assumption is that it was torn away when the moon was formed. There is supporting evidence. The mean density of the moon is much less than that of earth (3.3 compared with 5.5), suggesting that the moon took away none of the earth's heavy iron core, but that it is composed only of the granite and some of the basalt of the outer layers.

The birth of the moon probably helped shape other regions of the world's ocean besides the Pacific. When part of the crust was torn away, strains must have been set up in the remaining granite envelope. Perhaps the granite mass cracked open on the side opposite the moon scar. Perhaps, as the earth spun on its axis and rushed on its orbit through space, the cracks widened and the masses of granite began to drift apart, moving over a tarry, slowly hardening layer of basalt. Gradually, the outer portions of the basalt layer became solid and the wandering continents came to rest frozen into place with oceans between them. In spite of theories to the contrary, the weight of geologic evidence seems to be that the locations of the major ocean basins and the major continental land masses are today much the same as they have been since a very early period of the earth's history.

But this is to anticipate the story, for when the moon was born there was no ocean.

The gradually cooling earth was enveloped in heavy layers of cloud, which contained much of the water of the new planet. For a long time its surface was so hot that no moisture could fall without immediately being reconverted to steam. This dense, perpetually renewed cloud covering must have been thick enough that no rays of sunlight could penetrate it. And so the rough outlines of the continents and the empty ocean basins were sculptured out of the earth in darkness, in a Stygian world of heated rock and swirling clouds and gloom.

As soon as the earth's crust cooled enough, the rains began to fall. Never have there been such rains since that time. They fell continuously, day and night, days passing into months, into years, into centuries. They poured into the waiting ocean basins or, falling upon the continental masses, drained away to become sea.

That primeval ocean, growing in bulk as the rains slowly filled its basins, must have been only faintly salt. But the falling rains were the symbol of the dissolution of the continents. From the moment the rain began to fall, the lands began to be worn away and carried to the sea. It is an endless, inexorable process that has never stopped—the dissolving of the rocks, the leaching out of their contained minerals, the carrying of the rock fragments and dissolved minerals to the ocean. And over the eons of time, the sea has grown ever more bitter with the salt of the continents.

In what manner the sea produced the mysterious and wonderful stuff called protoplasm we cannot say. In its warm, dimly lit waters, the unknown conditions of temperature and pressure and saltiness must have been the critical ones for the creation of life from non-life. At any rate they produced the result that neither the alchemists with their crucibles nor modern scientists in their laboratories have been able to achieve.

Before the first living cell was created, there may have been many trials and failures. It seems probable that, within the warm saltiness of the primeval sea, certain organic substances were fashioned from carbon dioxide, sulphur, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and calcium. Perhaps these were transition steps from which the complex molecules of protoplasm arose—molecules that somehow acquired the ability to reproduce themselves and begin the endless stream of life. But at present no one is wise enough to be sure.

Those first living things may have been simple microorganisms rather like some of the bacteria we know today—mysterious borderline forms that were not quite plants, not quite animals, barely over the intangible line that separates the non-living from the living. It is doubtful that this first life possessed the substance chlorophyll, with which plants in sunlight transform lifeless chemicals into the living stuff of their tissues. Little sunshine could enter their dim world, penetrating the cloud banks from which fell the endless rains. Probably the sea's first children lived on the organic substances then present in the ocean waters or, like the iron and sulphur bacteria that exist today, lived directly on inorganic food.

All the while the cloud cover was thinning, the darkness of the nights alternated with palely illumined days, and finally the sun for the first time shone through upon the sea. By this time some of the living things that floated in the sea must have developed the magic of chlorophyll. Now they were able to take the carbon dioxide of the air and the water of the sea and of these elements, in sunlight, build the organic substances they needed. So the first true plants came into being.

Another group of organisms, lacking the chlorophyll but needing organic food, found they could make a way of life for themselves by devouring the plants. So the first animals arose, and from that day to this, every animal in the world has followed the habit it

learned in the ancient seas and depends, directly or through complex food chains, on the plants for food and life.

As the years passed, and the centuries, and the millions of years, the stream of life grew more and more complex. From simple, one-celled creatures, others that were aggregations of specialized cells arose, and then creatures with organs for feeding, digesting, breathing, reproducing. Sponges grew on the rocky bottom of the sea's edge and coral animals built their habitations in warm, clear waters. Jellyfish swam and drifted in the sea. Worms evolved, and starfish, and hard-shelled creatures with many-jointed legs, the arthropods. The plants, too, progressed, from the microscopic algae to branched and curiously fruiting seaweeds that swayed with the tides and were plucked from the coastal rocks by the surf and cast adrift.

During all this time the continents had no life. There was little to induce living things to come ashore, forsaking their all-providing, all-embracing mother sea. The lands must have been bleak and hostile beyond the power of words to describe. Imagine a whole continent of naked rock, across which no covering mantle of green had been drawn—a continent without soil, for there were no land plants to aid in its formation and bind it to the rocks with their roots. Imagine a land of stone, a silent land, except for the sound of the rains and winds that swept across it. For there was no living voice, and no living thing moved over the surface of the rocks.

Meanwhile, the gradual cooling of the planet, which had first given the earth its hard granite crust, was progressing into its deeper layers; and as the interior slowly cooled and contracted, it drew away from the outer shell. This shell, accommodating itself to the shrinking sphere within it, fell into folds and wrinkles—the earth's first mountain ranges.

Geologists tell us that there must have been at least two periods of mountain building (often called "revolutions") in that dim period, so long ago that the rocks have no record of it, so long ago that the mountains themselves have long since been worn away. Then there came a third great period of upheaval and readjustment of the earth's crust, about a billion years ago, but of all its majestic mountains the only reminders today are the Laurentian hills of eastern Canada, and a great shield of granite over the flat country around Hudson Bay.

The epochs of mountain building only served to speed up the processes of erosion by which the continents were worn down and their crumbling rock and contained minerals returned to the sea. The uplifted masses of the mountains were prey to the bitter cold of the upper atmosphere and, under the attacks of frost and snow and ice, the rocks cracked and crumbled away. The rains beat with greater violence upon the slopes of the hills and carried away the substance of the mountains in torrential streams. There was still no plant covering to modify and resist the power of the rains.

And in the sea, life continued to evolve. The earliest forms have left no fossils by which we can identify them. Probably they were soft-bodied, with no hard parts that could be preserved. Then, too, the rock layers formed in those early days have since been so altered by enormous heat and pressure, under the foldings of the earth's crust, that any fossils they might have contained would have been destroyed.

For the past 500 million years, however, the rocks have preserved the fossil record. By the dawn of the Cambrian period, when the history of living things was first inscribed on rock pages, life in the sea had progressed so far that all the main groups of backboneless or

invertebrate animals had been developed. But there were no animals with backbones, no insects or spiders, and still no plant or animal had been evolved that was capable of venturing onto the forbidding land. So for more than three-fourths of geologic time the continents were desolate and uninhabited, while the sea prepared the life that was later to invade them and make them habitable. Meanwhile, with violent tremblings of the earth and with the fire and smoke of roaring volcanoes, mountains rose and wore away, glaciers moved to and fro over the earth, and the sea crept over the continents and again receded.

It was not until Silurian time, some 350 million years ago, that the first pioneer of land life crept out on the shore. It was an arthropod, one of the great tribe that later produced crabs and lobsters and insects. It must have been something like a modern scorpion but, unlike some of its descendants, it never wholly severed the ties that united it to the sea. It lived a strange life, half-terrestrial, half-aquatic, something like that of the ghost crabs that speed along the beaches today, now and then dashing into the surf to moisten their gills.

Fish, tapered of body and stream-molded by the press of running waters, were evolving in Silurian rivers. In times of drought, in the drying pools and lagoons, the shortage of oxygen forced them to develop swim bladders for the storage of air. One form that possessed an air-breathing lung was able to survive the dry periods by burying itself in mud, leaving a passage to the surface through which it breathed.

It is very doubtful that the animals alone would have succeeded in colonizing the land, for only the plants had the power to bring about the first amelioration of its harsh conditions. They helped make soil of the crumbling rocks, they held back the soil from the rains that would have swept it away and, little by little, they softened and subdued the bare rock, the lifeless desert. We know very little about the first land plants, but they must have been closely related to some of the larger seaweeds that had learned to live in the coastal shallows, developing strengthened stems and grasping, rootlike holdfasts to resist the drag and pull of the waves. Perhaps it was in some coastal lowlands, periodically drained and flooded, that some such plants found it possible to survive, though separated from the sea. This also seems to have taken place in the Silurian period.

The mountains that had been thrown up by the Laurentian revolution gradually wore away, and as the sediments were washed from their summits and deposited on the lowlands, great areas of the continents sank under the land. The seas crept out of their basins and spread over the lands. Life fared well and was exceedingly abundant in those shallow, sunlit seas. But with the later retreat of the ocean water into the deeper basins, many creatures must have been left stranded in shallow, landlocked bays. Some of these animals found means to survive on land. The lakes, the shores of the rivers, and the coastal swamps of those days were the testing grounds in which plants and animals either became adapted to the new conditions or perished.

As the lands rose and the seas receded, a strange fishlike creature emerged on the land, and over the thousands of years its fins became legs, and instead of gills, it developed lungs. In the Devonian sandstone this first amphibian left its footprint.

On land and sea the stream of life poured on. New forms evolved; some old ones declined and disappeared. On land the mosses and the ferns and the seed plants developed. The reptiles for a time dominated the earth, gigantic, grotesque, and terrifying. Birds learned to live and move in the ocean of air. The first small mammals lurked inconspicuously in hidden crannies of the earth as though in fear of the reptiles.

When they went ashore the animals that took up a land life carried with them a part of the sea in their bodies, a heritage which they passed on to their children and which even today links each land animal with its origin in the ancient sea. Fish, amphibian, and reptile, warm-blooded bird and mammal—each of us carries in our veins a salty stream in which the elements sodium, potassium, and calcium are combined in almost the same proportions as in sea water. This is our inheritance from the day, untold millions of years ago, when a remote ancestor, having progressed from the one-celled to the many-celled stage, first developed a circulatory system in which the fluid was merely the water of the sea. In the same way, our lime-hardened skeletons are a heritage from the calcium-rich ocean of Cambrian time. Even the protoplasm that streams within each cell of our bodies has the chemical structure impressed upon all living matter when the first simple creatures were brought forth in the ancient sea. And as life itself began in the sea, so each of us begins his individual life in a miniature ocean within his mother's womb, and in the stages of his embryonic development repeats the steps by which his race evolved, from gill-breathing inhabitants of a water world to creatures able to live on land.

Some of the land animals later returned to the ocean. After perhaps 50 million years of land life, a number of reptiles entered the sea about 170 million years ago, in the Triassic period. They were huge and formidable creatures. Some had oarlike limbs by which they rowed through the water; some were web-footed, with long, serpentine necks. These grotesque monsters disappeared millions of years ago, but we remember them when we come upon a large sea turtle swimming many miles at sea, its barnacle-encrusted shell eloquent of its marine life. Much later, perhaps no more than 50 million years ago, some of the mammals, too, abandoned a land life for the ocean. Their descendants are the sea lions, seals, sea elephants, and whales of today.

Among the land animals there was a race of creatures that took to an arboreal existence. Their hands underwent remarkable development, becoming skilled in manipulating and examining objects, and along with this skill came a superior brain power that compensated for what these comparatively small mammals lacked in strength. At last, perhaps somewhere in the vast interior of Asia, they descended from the trees and became again terrestrial. The past million years have seen their transformation into beings with body and brain and spirit of man.

Eventually man, too, found his way back to the sea. Standing on its shores, he must have looked out upon it with wonder and curiosity, compounded with an unconscious recognition of his lineage. He could not physically re-enter the ocean as the seals and whales had done. But over the centuries, with all the skill and ingenuity and reasoning powers of his mind, he has sought to explore and investigate even its most remote parts, so that he might re-enter it mentally and imaginatively.

He built boats to venture out on its surface. Later he found ways to descend to the shallow parts of its floor, carrying with him the air that, as a land mammal long unaccustomed to aquatic life, he needed to breathe. Moving in fascination over the deep sea he could not enter, he found ways to probe its depths, he let down nets to capture its life, he invented mechanical eyes and ears that would re-create for his senses a world long lost, but a world that, in the deepest part of his subconscious mind, he had never wholly forgotten.

And yet he has returned to his mother sea only on her own terms. He cannot control or change the ocean as, in his brief tenancy of earth, he has subdued and plundered the

continents. In the artificial world of his cities and towns, he often forgets the true nature of his planet and the long vistas of its history, in which the existence of the race of men has occupied a mere moment of time. The sense of all these things comes to him most clearly in the course of a long ocean voyage, when he watches day after day the receding rim of the horizon, ridged and furrowed by waves; when at night he becomes aware of the earth's rotation as the stars pass overhead; or when, alone in this world of water and sky, he feels the loneliness of his earth in space. And then, as never on land, he knows the truth that his world is a water world, a planet dominated by its covering mantle of ocean, in which the continents are but transient intrusions of land above the surface of the all-encircling sea.





Boomerang

The bodhisattvas gladly return
 because nirvana makes no sense
 and so much help is needed here.
 That train conductor who spotted you fare
 when hearing you were unemployed
 and on your way to an interview.
 The black sheriff in Sparks, Nevada
 who brought you a pork chop dinner
 from the diner next door
 then drove you to the highway on-ramp.
 Mrs. Gonsalves at the free clinic
 who listened to your crisis
 as if it were HER life imploding.
 The bodhisattvas gladly return,
 gladly offer their reasons for doing so.
 “Nirvana is a spiritual contradiction.
 A blissful haven for those
 who have extinguished the self?—
 how intrinsically selfish!
 The purpose of enlightenment
 to knock you out of the loop
 and deposit a perfected something
 or nothing in a place of formless,
 changeless eternity?—dreary, unimaginative!
 Astrophysicists know the universe
 is ever expanding, that the stardust we are
 has no ending or destination,
 so to maintain a concrete
 or conceptual location exists
 where Buddha, Christ, Mohammed
 and other awakened ones finally come to a halt—illogical.”
 We’ll all be returning, they say,
 some more helpful than others,
 refining our service and love
 with a word or a gift or a life—
 then another.

Pilgrim's Progress

If you keep at it long enough, it becomes dream.
Existence is registered, addressed, released.
The self drops away
as the eyes become camera
focused by a spirit
without time or agenda.
And just when will this happen,
how long will it take,
where do faith, fate, or luck figure in?
So just go back to that age
when the earth was glacial,
or somewhere beyond where it's
fire, dust, or ice—
yet now this rare interval
of flesh close and precious,
a sojourn in the guest-house
of an inscrutable host.
You're lying in bed with a lover
you're lying in bed with cancer
you're lying in bed but also
sitting in a chair by the window
regarding the play of her hair on the pillow,
watching a dagger unfold in your side.

Ars Domestica

The plants have been watered,
carpet vacuumed, dog walked,
bed made, salmon defrosted,
lawn cut, laundry folded—
and the satisfaction of such care and maintenance
is neither great nor trivial
but one of the linchpins
of aesthetics and order,
the springboard to spiritual welfare,
the backdrop against which we can
inhabit our recent selves closer and freer,
garner the pluck, peace, and empathy
to better enter one another
better enter the random drama
beyond our insulated front door.

On The Trail at 6:00 A.M.

It's good to marvel at the fresh green rotors of sumac
stippled with clear beads of morning dew,
good to defer to the shy assemblages
of granite, moss, and lichen
and their eons of cool symbiosis.

It's good to gaze upward at the limitless sky
where hawks slip in and out of eyesight,
swallows flit and dip in hungry parabolas,
expanses of blue space quiet and empty the mind.

And it's good to have a small wooden flute
hooked to a rawhide necklace
to serenade the ticks, ants, and newts—
or just launch three ragged notes
into the dawn's porous air.

Rites of Passage

On the C train Saturday midnight
well-dressed packs of college kids
resume their alcoholic migration
from the watering-holes of Allston/Brighton
to the Serengeti of dance clubs off Boylston.
Boisterous, lewd, impetuous,—
exuding volatile fragrances,
natural and synthetic—
they swarm then clot the fare-box
before tipping down the length of the car
like a wounded Chinese dragon.
The females tenuously flaunt cleavage and rump
while the males posit, preen, and half-straddle,
but the atmosphere isn't so much erotic as faltering—
colts and fillies with a taste of jimsonweed
rushing half-blind and giddy to the hay.



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Why ? [a new fixtion]

(continued)

lxxxviii.

Dylan sees Maya & looks away. Maya sees Dylan & does not.
 He's never ridden a long distance bus before. It's like a city bus but softer & no
 change box. Longer distances between stops. One a town, it seems.
 Maya is sewing together a pair of pants from patches.
 A long white van with dusty back windows. Words carved in its dust:

KEEP GOING AND
 YOU WIL

Wil what? Will what? Maya is sifting through a bowl of fern leaves. Dylan squirms.
 The highway gets crowded & slow, Dylan wonders about his trip.
 Another dusty van, dark blue, & the dust reads:

IT'S REALLY A GAME
 YOU

Same strange writer?

Now Maya is reading her book found that day on a bench.
 Her hair is red & golden & blonde—and also hosts a single purple streak.
 She reads: "How anything came to be is a mystery. Even deducing your own life is
 impossible; untangling your own decisions from the will of others from the chances of time
 & space. I traced with my fist the puddles on my table. The TV mounted on the bar wall
 was loud & many watched. I didn't know how I had gotten here; I was simply watching for
 you to come & explain.

"You were watching the water & thinking about time & space. Some had written
 about one's collapse into the other. It wasn't that you didn't believe so much as you asked
 why.

"The TV seemed to get louder though nobody else flinched. She did, though, & her
 wait took on pain to its impatience.

"Perhaps we're best remembering those other days. There were traintracks &
 friendlier taverns than this. If I stop waiting for you, will you come back to me at last?"

She closes the book & breathes hard. What had the first 50 pages been like?

Pulls these pages from the book, old binding glue gives way easily, & looks 'em a
 moment, then Dylan across the aisle, then leans over.

"Would you take these for me?"

"Um?"

"As a favor. I don't want them right now but I might later. Or it won't matter."

"Oh."

"You can give them back if you get off before I do."

"OK?"

"Where are you going?"

"The ocean?"

"Hey! That's great. I'm going near there too. Astoria. Been there?"

"No."

"I don't want to bother you."

Dylan smiles. Good move. Maya now knows what she needed to know, wanted to know, since she saw him get on the bus & later glance at her.

She sits back, in her own smile, & thinks to read again:

"We thought we had it down. We really did. Like you feel wind or bleed, we were sure the heroes were easy to like, worth a knee to their words. The villains could be beaten but it would take enough time to sweeten the triumph, ripe its best fruit.

"We'd meet news ones & bring them in & along. Uncertainty was light about our wings; our maps were true. There would come more of us all the time. Our days were orchards of stratagems & our nights bonfire fields mysterious with virtue."

She stops. Why is she doing this? Is she? Until she arrives in the town & calls the number on a scrap in her pocket, nothing is sure.

She looks at Dylan. Could he? It would not be hard. Could? He's holding her pages closely, gently.

Not back, she's sure.

Could he? Could he?

lxxxix.

"I dreamed of you the other night."

"Ha! You got my message."

"You send notes by dream?"

"Not my style, you say?"

"*Exactly* your style."

She smiles & tends her cacti. Hums to them.

"You speak cactus."

"They listen. Not much to say."

"I'm here. Now what?"

"You're not listening to me like I want."

"Maybe I can't."

"No. That's not it."

"I want to."

She looks hard upon me. "I don't know that you do. You're superstitious of anything that alters your groove."

"I suppose."

"Even for the better."

"Meaning?"

She pauses. "You can do better & it doesn't need to be harder."

"Easing up on pedal isn't much advice I can do with."

She smiles. "There's a lot to it. But how to get your superstitions to cooperate."

"Only to make my writing better."

She nods. "What else?"

"I don't have anything else."

"No?"

"Not that is surely mine. Everything else depends on others. Comes & goes."

"What would you write of if anything?"

"I'd write elaborate plots that traveled everywhere & criss-crossed & played out strange & true."

"You don't do that now?"

"I don't know what I do. More habit than Art."

"You believe that?"

"More than not."

"What then?"

"I don't know."

"You believe there's an answer?"

"Yes. I do."

"What then?"

"I don't stop."

"And?"

"I don't stop."

"Then what?"

"Long I've wanted fiction again that felt to my moment, & I don't know about this book."

She nods. Stands. "Let's go."

"Where?"

"Into your world."

I squirm & she grimaces. "You have no choice, the story is going with me."

We leave her smoky cave & walk into the street. I don't know which street or when.

A street in a city, it seems, & this is alright to start.

"Keep up!" she barks merry.

"Why?"

"You'll miss everything!"

I walk, waiting for some facts, telling colors or trees.

"Waiting does no good. It never ends if you let it."

I look in a store window & there is a fireplace. A group sit near it, all intent on a huge book between them. Merry Muse does not hurry me off. "Is this something?"

"Everything is."

That makes me turn away & lose myself in the deep glaring traffic, want to leap in & not know how.

"There's nothing to know."

"You sound like a crank hippy shaman."

"Disprove it!"

"It's not worth disproving!"

"What then?"

"Come on!"

We walk from highway to quiet shoreline & I get aggravated. The water is glassy still. The air steams with cool.

I sit down on the sand. "No more."

"Why?"

"These pages don't matter. There's nothing to them."

All blue eyes she webs about me & what world I know.

"Please listen. As long as your pen moves, it matters. The why isn't always around to comfort you. But never stop, & let it be easier. There's nothing in your way. Tell everyone this. It's your mission."

A kiss of her lips to the moment between us & she's gone, here I am, a Friday night joint, streetlamp on yellow leaves, long hilly view of hurrying autos, & within I sit with my beloved. She reads. I writhe. We gather & walk on.

xc.

She reads again: "You're reading this with doubt near your heart. I know you. Your day passes by glide & jerk. You watch others & wonder their plans. The world stretches endless from here, from you, & you wish to fling, arc from the there you are to the here you wish to be.

"You smoke a cigarette for comfort. Or eat a chocolate bar. Maybe you lean into the shine & allow admirers to accumulate. One or another.

"Dreams hint, advise, confuse. There are weightless hours & all falls away but the essential. The moon perfectly round. The stars' sky-line cryptic urge.

"My drink is near gone. I turn to the TV & that cursed program is nearly over, its edges are severally burning to its core.

"I don't know. The next paragraph won't know either. There will be many, many more, & wisdom among them, maybe but too many & conflicting.

"Maya, I have to say—"

She closes the book upon this line, terrified. Curious. But no, not yet. She has some other business right now, with this strange boy.

He is watching the scenery, so close to it he hardly exists otherwise. She watches him a bit before speaking.

xci.

I try to remember where this is & what she means by conjuring it. Feels like winter, cold, windless, familiar to my skin.

“New England”

She says nothing.

A pond. Dawn. Rimmed by bare trees. Walden?

Still nothing.

I don’t remember ever being at Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts at dawn.

She quivers but stays silent.

“I used to adore New England. Its trees, its books, its history.”

“Then you didn’t.”

“It receded.”

“You left.”

“I’d been here for a long time. I was tired of it.”

“And now?”

“I don’t miss it much. My fondness is sentimental.”

“Why?”

“I left. Does it matter? Few of the people I knew recall me. Would they make an effort to find me? I’m not so utterly missing, not at all. The trail I left was light & seems mostly gone.”

The air gets colder. I remember. Gut of winter, years gone by, Burke & I met a swimmer, one of those old men who swim ponds & seas til they freeze over. He boasted, humorously.

I see noone.

“How does writing this help my fixation matter again?” I shout. “How is this not ink drooling useless on a page like a bib!” I stop, try to calm.

“How!”

Alone. She doesn’t answer such questions, they don’t even exist in her world, whatever that may be.

The pond begins to fall away, little holds it together now. I try to pull it back. Sniff its shiny air, imagine its paths I’ve climbed around here. It wavers. I remember coming here many times too uncertain not to be trod with worry. It’s fading. I don’t care enough for these memories; I let it go.

xcii.

“How anything came to be is a mystery,” he reads because she insisted. He stops, wonders how her hair got a purple streak.

“Don’t you like books?”

He nods.

“Why are you going to the ocean?”

“I’ve never seen it before.”

“Is that why?”

He stares at her.

“What do you know?” she asks.

“About what?”

“Everything!” She moves into his pair of seats, resting on her knees, leaning lightly into him. She smells like something strange & weightless.

He pauses. A few thoughts stumble around in his head. None seem eager.

Honesty overleaps him. “You’re pretty,” he says softly.

She shudders like from a smack. Leans back, nearly falls. He grabs her; she lets him. Then she catches herself & steadies stubbornly.

“What else?”

“I like you.”

“Why?”

“You’re not someone else.”

She moves back to her seat, keeping his glance, bearing his words like clean cold water cupped in her hands. Curls in her seat away from him, slowly. Seems to descend into sleep.

xciii.

A book should live by its mystery, seek to trouble, struggle, shine, collapse, become new & new again as sheaf fruits—dirty, ugly, accidental, branches up & out all sides, leaves, sprouts, lost because mortal & bound, something else too, remember days lost, a good few of them at least—

Sitting among talkers, swirling in one’s mind, the music visible, dancers on the face of the noisy hour—

help help help

happiness

dreams ring round me & pierce through I follow within choiceless can the words never end this time I used to catch a train at midnight from my happy writing place it was a long way home often I was poor & loveless but I’d written wild for something

& something had coaxed me along, year by year, I sat on buses & trains & planes

help help help

happiness happiness

I struggled & broke into characters, into songs I wanted to be many to know the what & the how of otherwise—

I wanted to know what anything meant so I could start there

Millennial Artist's Farting Guide

*There is secret flatulence
among these bus riders, a known
stink when the bus swerves &
ass cheeks lose hold of their
bulbous gaseous ball off it goes—*

I cared for it all, I wrote & wrote, & read thick books & libraries year by year & the lonely nights summed higher & higher—

The world proceeds. None speak of slowing or stopping it. Riders on the spaceship hang on & eventually bury within. Break down, & release.

"It's OK, Raymond."

"Rebecca."

"Yes."

"Not yet some other version of some girl-fancy I'm chasing."

"No. I'm me again, as always."

"What is this book? Why do I keep doing it?"

"I don't know. Nothing else is as good?"

"What do I do with the bad hours?"

"What have you always done?"

"Stumble along, wait them out. Whatever works, even barely."

"Old memories. Missing old friends I could hardly talk to now anyway."

"I know."

"Melancholy. Sentiment. Bullshit."

"Yah. But no."

"What do I do?"

"Keep doing. There will be magick hours. Like always."

"Why do I weaken?"

"Saving for this. Even if this is hard. It's yours. Nobody has any other instructions."

"That's true. It doesn't matter to anyone else but nothing else matters to me."

She nods.

I remember: no faith but in works.

No faith but in works.

No faith but in works.

No faith but in warts.

No face but in warts.

No fate but in wars.
 No phase but in forks.
 None.

xciv.

Is it the elixir or her drinker? Come on, fancy hard into that one. Did LSD invent the world or vice-versa? What would you do without the elixir? Would you bother?

Come on this fancy let it open out—what fear anymore? None but molecular breakdown. No human threat? Not as much. What humans cannot control or beat is something worse. What is the pulse to destroy? Where this great push to annihilate & call it a deity's will?

No human imagination for the happy God, the nature-loving, long-lived God, the singing, open-hearted, silly stupid God leading by song & game?

Why only the suffering God, angry God, distant God, burning, brutal, threatening, abandoning, vengeful, bitter, violent, *insane God*?

Why? Tall buildings to celebrate cruelty & its endurance! To sanctify it. Make life a suffering cauldron & lo its afterworldly promise beckons sweeter!

Tell me something new. Life is suffering. Bah! Attachment to things cause hurt. Bah!

Blabbering bullshit & no answer to them. Whatever this is, whatever to come, nothing human contains it.

Nobody died for your sins. There is no sin you will die for but your own. Being alive is its own hard price & fair reward. Kneel to no man. Kneel not! Then kneel to all as humility & love owed to any & all.

Kneel. Sing. Kneel. Sing!

The days have a ragged, jarring quality, earthen floors uneven, treacherous, I look on the sky's self-created coherence & wonder over it—

A husk half releases, half clutches back—memories cruise about with uncertain intent—

I walk back into Luna T's Cafe & the drinkers at the bar hail me—

"How's tricks, Cap'n?"

"Sometimes not enough."

Several nod.

"So what do I do?"

Nobody speaks.

"I really want to know!"

One turns to me hard. "Stop fucking around in that head of yours. Simple. Hit the wheel harder & go farther." The others nod but stare at their drinks.

"I've heard that advice before. Why doesn't it catch?"

"Maybe it's trying to" says Rebecca next to me.

"Will it?"

"Will you let it?" demands Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker.

"What then? Another crash?"

"Maybe" says the drinker who spoke first. "But you know that."

"What about the elixir?"

"Do you doubt it?"

"No. I doubt me."

"You can't grow much from doubt. Roots stick because you keep at it, long past when you can easily sense through."

Nobody speaks.

The bar unhinges & looses gone. I see Rebecca's smile lastly: "Maybe it's trying to . . ."

xcv.

A long view of trees & flat sky, some city in the further distance, & mountains still beyond. Table with its notebooks, novel, soda cans, detritus—

I think of another summer when I had to shake hard to get my head righter—there've been a few I suppose—

Yon a construction nearby my old bookstall shill. It's gone. I've not been back, but it's gone.

A series of lives they do not blend into one.

Another empty cafeteria & me in the corner pen moving. Long past its social heyday or even its larger aspirations of one sort.

No why. No explain. On it goes.

Now sitting at the corner of the bar at Luna T's Cafe, & mulling my old maps & lists to make fixtion, what I did then, what I could do still—

A wish to disappear into pages, sink like dirt into water, not annihilation but an other-joining, a melding unto,

& this book not another ending but a bridge—a flight from there to there—

invent fixtion new yet again—

I've outgrown this & know not how to carry it along—how to keep doing what does not touch to my inmost anymore—what would succeed it?

A child sat at play with sticks & rubber bands, constructing a world, transforming from meager to vast, sticks buildings, bands roads, sticks spaceships, bands herds of cattle. The few of number & kind became many & various.

The threat came not from the single chair awry but the nine lined up neatly. Harmony's lure is the danger. The trick is to induce other chairs out of precision.

The books are for the most part wrong. The books encourage tranquility in a violent world, inward grasping in a lonely one, outer authority in a fearful one—yet a life without them distorts & lies too—someone can tell you how to raise a rose or what a rose is or how it

resembles a trembling wish. The questions like these go part of the way—to go the rest tis needful to ask: why a rose at all? Not merely asked of self or of roses, but of all?

A point here? Any? Nothing contains the world in its grasp, nor does the world hold all.

To write as I wish would be to stop distinguishing altogether between world & Art, reality & fiction—between prose & poetry—I’ve gone part of this way but not all—I don’t know how to go all—

Dylan & Maya were walking together down a long road. Maya’s hair is loosely tied back though her purple streak is free. Her eyes a vague blue that seems to fire into crimson when she herself does. She is thin & somewhat incomplete. Her hand does not hold Dylan’s but keeps near it, watching, making sure.

“I’m coming with you.”

“You can.”

“That’s all.”

He nods. They figured out at the last station stop that their walk to the ocean will be miles.

“Do you have any money?”

“Yah. I got paid.”

“You have a job?”

“I guard a building.”

“How did you get that?”

“My friends got it for me. They didn’t like where I was living.”

“Where?”

“Under a bridge.”

“Oh. I’ve done that. You meet some crazy people.”

He nods. Their hands brush, & skitter back.

No time. Walk a long stretch, rest a little. A bottle of water at a grocer’s. The sun doesn’t leave until late evening & they keep walking.

“Help me” is written along the street over & over it leads them away from their direction but they follow. The letters get wilder as they go on, but they follow silent & watching for what will reveal—

The road is no longer pavement & the words are scorched into the earth—their water bottle is empty & it’s getting dark—

Dylan stops, uncertain, but Maya nods & they keep going, into the woods that seem . . . white—

Dylan fingers his bag of mushrooms within his traveling satchel, & considers. Maya is looking ahead in her curious, restless way.

What this, & why think of them? He's not sure he trusts them & wonders if their help would be relevant. Eh? Needed? He thinks wordlessly, his best method.

Maya nearer him by heart than hand, feels that clean beat, feels herself forming an open border with it, feels more than that, here is something worth its complex, here between them a rising light, a new way of knowing two souls make uniquely between each other—

She gets very excited for a moment & lets the rush wild through her deliciously, & then lingering pulls the far edges back. They cross again when the scared man collides in them. Now heaped in a surprising tangle, sitting on ground hardly visible, looking each to the other.

"I don't know what's happening."

"I don't think we do either."

"Where is this?"

"We're not sure."

"Where did you come from?"

"Back there somewhere. We were walking to the sea when we saw these signs written on the road. 'Help Me' they said, over & over."

"Help who?"

"You, maybe. That's how we ended up here, & here you are. Are you in trouble?"

John shakes his head. Then nods, slower. "I think so. My boss told me to follow what he said & I didn't. It keeps getting worse."

Dylan & Maya nod.

"I thought you two worked for him."

"We don't know your boss. What's wrong with him?"

"I don't really know him either. He brought me out here . . . somewhere . . . to watch over his land. But he had rules & limits. I broke them. I had to find out what he was hiding."

"Did you?"

"I've been running or crazy or both for awhile now, I'm not sure any of this is real."

Maya laughs. "We're real. Dylan is. I am. I'm Maya."

John laughs. "Your name does not assure me!"

A commercial comes on the TV & the bar gets talky. Several drinkers think Maya is wearing too much. A few wonder what drugs wrote *this* week's show.

I sit & find comfort in this alone, pen spitting to paper, old places, which still thicks green & pink to a wish—

I fall back from the bar stool to armchair, from Luna T's Cafe to CoffeeTime Coffeehouse, from some Triptopolis where this book is set to Portland, Oregon of my haunted secret hours & my live, present night—

The TV won't come on now & the drinkers complain. They eye me darkly & I shrug.

“It’s just a show.”

Maybe call the new Noisy Children album *Up from Heaven*, he’s thinking as the night trails away & what severally occurs in the book looses, dims. Of course an LP, they’re back in style but never really left. Best way to describe this tour, would anyone who comes to these shows buy it? He laughs & puts his guitar away.

Would they come if no band appeared? Isn’t it close to that? Would it matter? When will the music simply take over again?

It devolves to bits, to the caught consciousness of the lucky hour, the continuity only in the accumulated sheaf, the recurring faces, the style or what’s left of it—

The younger, newer characters don’t really know this world or its history, perhaps I protect them from it as I can—

Toward what? Toward the end, that’s really all—

xcvii.

“Heavy hours to the oar & rarely the look around for sky or shore, years pass & now more often a look, what is this traveling life & through where?

“Eat a piece & find other ways to keep at the oar & still study beyond its task—eat a piece & the songs all oarsmen sing thin in the ear & explain less. Distractions, not revelations. But what then?

“The oar heavier still but no manner to release it. Through the drenches & dries, what else? Where to? Faces in the boat change with the years. The boat gets bigger & slower.

“And still those stolen looks around at the creatures in the sky & along the shore. Why don’t they row?

“Rowing ever by sun & moon, but sleep is not denied. Chaotic for years, untelling, not a guru. Then more so. Wish it & no rowing within dreams. No oars. There is other then. The limits themselves are limited.”

Global Wall pauses. His audience is so thick now some sit on temporary ledges up & down the walls. He inhales to speak again but doesn’t. No more for now. He walks out of the building, stage to steps to corridor to revolving door, in a blur, thinking about hives & honey & what he will do when he gets back there.

He doesn’t like to be away long.

Or call it *Give Back Our Names* & piss & sneeze at pretty notes & punk ones alike—cough at strums & shit at harmonies—what other ways neither beyond nor higher—just other—fuck mere and wish—all—all—

wish it & the day & its next & how not to see its souls leaning against one another for meaning & warmth none have alone?

Call it by a new title every day to prayer the great kinesis & hold some in a pattern & cradle that hour.

Certainly the players know how to get there, some why & some luck & something else, a magick, a god, a fanaticism for the sugar in living soundscapes—

Dylan & Maya sit with their friend & he feels safe, protected & protecting both. Would they go where he tends? They might. Would he ask it of them?

Maya says, “You decide. We’re not far. Everyone has to help.”

Dylan watches her, learning. She moves through it, riled, affecting. He watches. What else.

Call it *Fuck or Die* & be done with the pretty thoughts. Call it *War Strangles*. Call it anything. It matters so much. Yet?

Global Wall returns to his soft creatures & is relieved awhile. No gift in this world not a burden too, he knows. He’s glad there are many, they nurture each other, press into several knitting dreams while awaiting him, he points & says but less often, what else? Little. Spicy wisps. Memories.

Still, never to slow. Columns will burn & most will rupture, what on goes will be too hard to disarray & too soft to disloyal.

Global Wall nods. He is doing as he must.

For a moment to remember a table, gone, in a year & a city gone, sat there unimagining this seat, this year, this city, memory an ever-expanding mass, a country within, a nation? a body politic? what, & what?

Sat there & did not know. Sit here now & do not know. What then? I could have, this, that, didn’t.

Turning points, more like reinventions, more like re-bornings. A few, several, many, countless. Each tall & no return, each a god & pantheon accumulates.

What this moment then? Another bus, music on headphones. Mind chooses pen & paper, & this telling.

Kinder? Sadder? Smoother? Decades for a really fine sand of empathy & humor? Regrets everywhere the dead forest within & hopes what still grows between the shadows.

What? & What then? You can’t tell me, how this learned & now known? Wave a hammer, tend a bloom, but why the hammer & wherefrom the first bloom, nay. You canna, neither I.

What then? Walk on until. Breath, relax, again. Watch between the beats. Jostle with language’s wielding & experience’s claims.

More, bid yes. Better, allow chance.

Remember because it’s more of what remains. But remember wilder, leave little to cement up, foul with reverent visits.

Everything years, more true than much, & useful for thoughts & thus perhaps actions.

The little table wasn't there very long, yet see it remains right now. Much remains. What then?

Rain coming & gone, dreams resume, love knots closer to rework its potent for continuing days. There are waves & flickers around always.

And next? Another disaster on TV, watch it pass, it's not yours, yours will come, drowning in a city, your last few breaths & then gone, a landscape you'll never know like heartbeat, one or another, the bomb will hit, & you'll be gone, going now, the path ceaseless, but you'll be gone & that's it—

What? What then? I thought about this, the desert around, hours & hours, hark the past, its near but no touch, can't kiss or throttle it, all them ghosts, hours & hours, what? What then? Felt me weary, felt me sad, felt me a thing crumbling,

come upon a great creature roaring out of the earth, the earth itself as shaped roar, there was a moment, & the other when the many dancers toyed & teased their flames—

I tried even as try felt thin—let out oceans within to eat worlds of woe—called the sparkled skies to my work—

If nothing else assures me it's the sun up every day, my eyes & heart slave not to my proximity to surrender, the way music still the lawless child streaking my veins—

What? What then? No answers, not one, not many, more a shifting few, a cluster of insist, how much pushes along every minute, toward better, right, wrong, still toward that chance of better—

But still to ask: Why? More than What? or What now? Tis why that controls & directs, runs deep among blood, bones, heart, head—Why? asked & answered every minute, perpetually—

I asked it in the desert but received nothing clear to bring back—I ask it now in a restful hour & little faith it will address the next—

Why? is helplessly potent—solitary, great—

“Any thoughts on what he's saying?”

“He's doing what he always does. Looking for a way back to the story.”

“Think he'll find it?”

“When he wants to.”

It never stops. The notebooks keep filling fast & slow—they're all that has lasted from gone years—

What will their next page be like?

their last? What really ends? Why?

xcviii.

Something between suffering & dreams is what I'm thinking right now, when I push too hard it hurts but when I let it roll about me—

Nothing really yet, nothing I can explain to myself then do with—

Not yet—

Suffering & dreams—

What? What then? Why? Ask 'em like a hard blow of bullets, look great about & ask, what then, why? What? Ask, ask, I sat before a blinking box in a room of someones & asked it silently—

jump out & now the trees around, is it the White Forest? Near the Ampitheatre?

& out again here is Luna T's Cafe at the bar the drinkers click the TV between the bald bastard & his big guns & the drowned city full of soldiers & reporters—

& out again I'm on my old horsey bike in a desert mania, riding toward the weakest hours looking but none too hard anymore, why? What? What now? & out again now waking from dream of an old war, a complexity I tangle in

& out again on a train rushing over a bridge near dawn the faces crowd closely & lonely as I write something pen & paper leaning up to my face

& out again it continues this way, something between suffering & dreams—

When did it get repetitive? Faces resemble, the waters narrow, when did I hold back from the page, when did I lack the inner yowl, when did the push seem fucking pointless, when did I look on others as impediment & threat, when did ideal twist wrong? What to do now?

I walk suddenly into my own past, not long ago, still this western city, arrive upon a night I watched go ugly, I remember watching a movie sharp & loud, there was pizza on the living room floor, suddenly she had to be on the phone, did it ring? It was her kin, she talked on the phone upstairs, implied she was in danger, hit it, hit that moment, she comes down

"Tell them you need a ride home."

"What?"

"No. Tell them you're coming home tonight. We'll go to the bus station. You'll go. I'm done. This is over. You told me. I believe you. Someday this night will haunt me like a chopped-off limb. Leave. Now."

She looks at me. Does she beg? Does she go?

Could I have done it differently? Realized I had no chance? That I'd lost before I came out West?

What if I'd told my friend I'd ended it & badly needed a job? What if I'd turned toward the basics of survival not angrily but with great need?

But I did eventually. Why does this haunt me then?

Because my Art was so close, breaking apart, my Art was near to gone even as I wrote it wildly desperate, I tried to keep what was gone by it, I did everything & nothing worked.

I lost people then, the single & whole of people, felt betrayed in ways I cannot recover, & so I write now to move along, accept the gash in my heart, make Art of it too, make Art of everything like I did once, make something good, raise, raise, raise,

"I saw that picture of the dog, how cute, oh my god!" some slinked pink piece tells her plastic toy to another plastic toy,

I would rather see it burn all out than how the suffering goes on year by year, all is eating fucking shitting dying mixed up with waiting watching & tapping

Beat me til I feel better, that is different, I can't talk this fool shit to a single anyone, I'm not talking to anyone, I'm talking to me, that's how it is, there is no audience, there is me & my fucking wild pen & this notebook, nobody, nothing else, help, help, help, I can't yet do, I am calm, I move along, I pay for goods, I try at the desk & kiss in the bed, & explain nothing to anyone because there are no answers just impulses there are simply complex hives of multiple infinite barks call it a city many cities call it a world

I don't believe it I've seen its small place, its single level it's mereness—
help help help help

There is deep down no we, not an I, there is no here there no between no high no less no good no change this or that I have none to give or wish—plastic & wood & electric noise, nothing, what? what then? Why? Stop fucking looking at me I'm not a fucking novel diversion for your boredom, your bus ride, your cafe evening—

Listen, nobody, listen: I sat alone at the table, green seed, sat there with other notebooks, sat alone & peopled worlds where I mattered, where every face & its name mattered, I peopled impossible places at that lone table & I've never stopped I'm still peopling impossible worlds, still lone at the table, lovers & miles & years later, the doors of LSD & eros & dance, travels deep & raw, the dirt of sadness, the tracks through others' hearts, the money & its rude ways, how it nears to blood in its power but not quite still at that table still lone & looking & peopling impossible worlds

I look at her. "The hour you kissed him, our heart cracked & fell dry to the ground."
She says nothing. "I love you."
"You love nothing. Go find something to love. It's not me if it ever was."

I look at her. "Fix our fucking shower & clean up the fucking house. One day you will miss me when months pass & nothing."

I look at her & say. "You'll never know how your nasty little note hurt me. I won't even be a memory for you to clutch a pang. I remember. You were the first cruel person to me. Cruel with no motive. Cruel because you could be."

How far back does suffering go? Are the scars of suffering live over generations & continents? What else travels but books & village myths? What travels among the pages, the ways of sewing boots & skinning beasts?

What further back? When did dreams begin? What set off that first one? What did it say that was too much or too angled to know?

I remember long loud nights sucking at pints of stout among those I called brothers. What? What next? I don't know what they are now, what they became, I called it a youth, called the faces distinct, cradled their names in my hands & hearts—

listen: I don't know but this doing, my life many thousand nights doing this & what else?

listen: I don't believe but I don't not.
Faith is stuck to me foreign & forever.

I look at her & say, "Goodbye. If I had done it tonight it would have been better."

I look at her & say, "I should have told you to clean up our fucking lives. You punished us all for your anger. I did nothing to you."

I look at her & say, "Your kind ruled me for much of my life then to now, I did things, moved, changed, twisted, to please a succession of you most of whom gave me little & nothing."

I look within & realize I would not be here but for all that. Where, what then?
Elsewhere, elsewhom.

Faith is stuck to me foreign & forever.

There is no Art but the truth.

xcix.

Global Wall is more relaxed now. He's gone over the alarm system with his chief security officer, the one he instructed to make sure no monitoring device is ever visible. Unlimited budget & total accountability were his other parameters.

The man nodded. He had worked for loony rich powerful men before, knew how they thought, their obsession with perfection. He only asked one question at this first meeting of theirs.

"Shoot to kill?"

"No. They belong to me. They are to be unharmed at all costs."

"And others who may get involved?"

Global Wall nodded & dismissed him.

Later Global Wall will visit them. They like it, once they accept their new lives. The early stages are scripted & he has no taste for it. His design, every last bit, but not to his liking.

One concern had been brought to him. A man loose in the White Woods. Nothing worrisome: a new employee, unarmed, foolishly curious. Global Wall nodded again. In his

own suite a select few waited him. Since he changed them often, a random rotation he's conceived but did not control, he didn't know which ones. Sometimes a rookie with especial promise thrown in for advanced training.

But he was tired. They gathered around him as he fell to his night terrors. The rookie kissed his forehead. She'd seen how it could go here otherwise & decided to survive. Conjuring her few memories from TV she lay near him all night awake, willing, soft.

Global Wall saw the ice approaching & cringed. Shook. Growled. Roared. Beat the blood within to ready.

Maya brings out her book as Dylan brings out his bag of mushrooms as John decides they had better try some new way quickly or he had better leave them

He looks from the curled grey boogers in Dylan's hand to the torn dirty book in Maya's—

“Is this what we have to help us?”

He looks harder at Maya then stops. Not now, yet, maybe ever. Still, there's that too.

He stands.

Maya stands too, stubborn, something else. Fearless, nothing to lose. She's wrong about that. Always more to lose while alive.

He finds her curled loosely next to & his first thought, one combining lick & crunch, becomes his second thought, which is: protect her.

No, not how it works here. Long ago, not how it works. Here's how it works: feel a little, just a bit too much, a snapped button & a word & all gone. That's how things are built to work here. Purpose, mission.

Protect her.

Hunger, the beast within, shifts, testing. All are garbed for their purpose, their place in the mission.

Protect her.

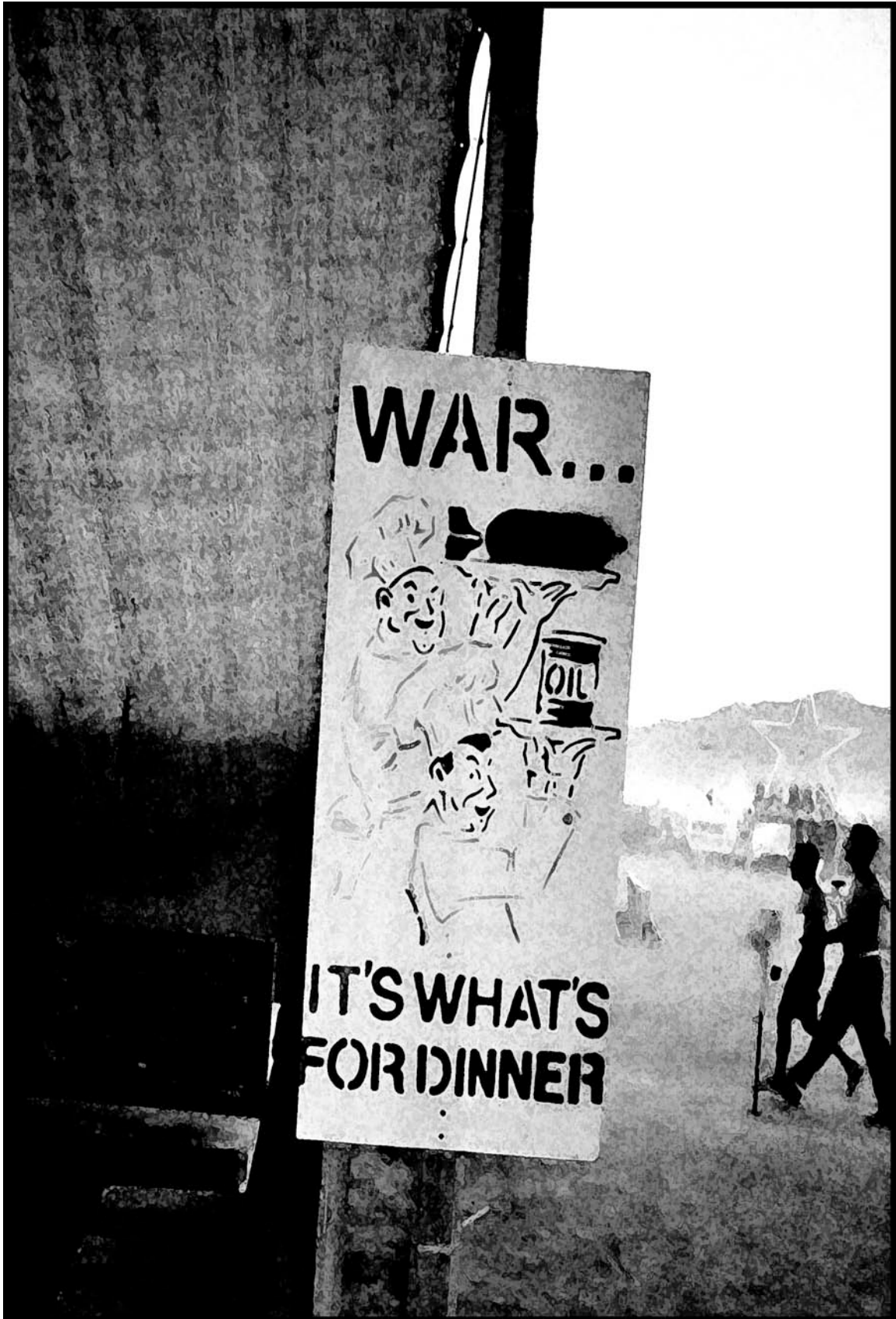
He orders her to the corner, faced to the wall, kneeling. She obliges but loses nothing. He begins to work. The others are ordered away. His man is summoned. Ways are discussed. She doesn't listen.

What, what then? Any face that matters? Where? What hand, what eye, which voice?

It wasn't always so elaborate. It used to be blunt. He'd decided that what dank within him, that monstrous & foul, was a world not to be tamped & held but raised up—raised high—

Money bought him what he wanted, land, buildings. Slowly built up, his identity shed dollar by dollar, who he was left behind until what remained was respectfully buried in a good cemetery in a town where he'd not lived a single day.

The early mistakes. No successful force in this universe *forces*. Too much will lash back & harder eventually. A few men sat in prisons or rested in morgues.



His man came along, studied the operation, that it would not last, no purpose, no pleasure, & asked, simply: Why?

Global Wall said because I want to decide. His man said it's easier to decide in an atmosphere of agreeability. Grabbing them off the street doesn't help.

What then?

Make them want to come. Invite them. Nothing lures the bunny like a whiff of free carrot.

So the operation shed itself, sold its assets, sent every girl home. Their cracked conflicting story led the authorities to the spot & nothing was there. Not a footprint, not a charred brick. Asked who, none could say. Asked what, it was hard to describe. He took something. I'm missing something.

Later, dreams. I would have given it to him. I liked him. I wanted to. But he wasn't having fun. If it's going to be that way it has to be fun.

A few tried to find him, not for revenge, more for another try. Go figure. Waste a life doing so.

They refined their purpose. Rougher, more spiritual.

Sometimes a lesson had to be incurred. Global Wall taught his people how. How to touch. How to speak. What would work. What was allowed.

Control was not stressed from above but among. Each group had at least one girl who was the virus. Studied before contacted, at length. Her life filled with Global Wall's people. Every movement, every word. her favorite teacher. The neighbor who invited her over to try on bikinis he wanted to give his daughter. The musician she most admired who, beholding her X'd figure in his hotel bed, elected to kiss her hand twice & her left nipple once before carrying her into a taxi. This girl would infect the rest with stories, erotic mind control so subtle none would admit its reality. What they'd come to from strung-out curiosity become obsession. Why her, not me? Why any of of them? *Why not me?*

Dylan spills out half his bag & they share between them, chewing slowly. The book is next. John eyes Maya but she is recalling why she'd come out to Astoria & how a decision waited her still.

c.

How does one diminish from one's kind without doing likewise from one's self? There is no place to surrender but how spent the hours, how spent the days. None else.

What? What then? To keep asking, & why this book called *Why?* What matter?

"Tell me what else to know"

She says nothing.

"I see the same & more of it all the time. Always near chaos, always near solution. Never either for long."

She still says nothing.

"Tell me something."

"Tell you what? You've come this far & know nothing. What would you have me add? It's your path. Walk it! Bravely, or be a coward, but walk it."

"Nothing else?"

"I haven't had anything else to show you in a long time. We ran our days. We keep around each other now for sentiment."

"That's it?"

"Not much else right now. Maybe later."

I nod.

ci.

So figure what about Noisy Children, more sentiment or vital, or necessary good or bad, which if any—they are touring again & sometimes the reviews get strange, as though Americus assures that reporters drink the kykeon & witness the secrets.

The night they run into Ricky Jensen is sweet. He's left *Thunder Road* as too mainstream & vanilla to get rock & roll anymore. Now he runs a website with a wide following—& paper issues in major cities to keep a hand in that way too—

Calls it, what else, *Eleusian Times*, attracts writers & artists toward the underground tip, but Jensen is still looking angled at everything.

I sit with him & Americus. Old trio.

"Who's most real among?"

"We're all real, Soulard."

"Sure thing. Real as necessary."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning how real do people have to be most times? Enough to breath, eat, shit, speak some words. Fuck maybe, that's another level. I'm just asking how much real is needed? How much is showing up clothed & clean & on time?"

"Yah. That answers me."

"What else would you want? There are no answers. I show up in your books rarely but I do keep showing up. You explain my doings each time. So last time was *Thunder Road*, now *Eleusian Times*. A wife for awhile. Some groupies. OK. I accept that."

"And my band. You used to know all our albums by heart. Now we're something else."

"Is this bad?"

"It just is. You don't write on these pages like once."

"I miss those years."

"They mostly sucked."

"But they're so gone."

“You miss their possibilities.”
 “Yah I guess.”
 “So what next? Are you asking that?”
 “Yah, I ask. But I don’t see much to answer me.”
 “It’s there. Look for the subtle & smart.”
 “Meaning?”
 “Tend natively.”
 “Fuck you both.” I stand.
 They nod & smile. “Whatever it takes to still care, Soulard.”
 “I do. Fuck all, I do.”

Jensen watches Noisy Children rock his city’s best bar, sees how the walls shimmer gone, the fires, the dancers, the band opens out into a shared dream. He nods. Good. Good.

cii.

They chew & chew & make faces at each other & Maya laughs like starlight & crickets, Dylan winces happy within watching her chew & chew wants to ask her have you eaten mushrooms

“—before?” John is looking at him. But he asked Maya because she says maybe so.

“Maybe so?” he says aloud & is shocked by his voice.

She smiles but adds no comment. Seeing his face crinkle she sticks out her tongue & rolls her eyes up into her head. He laughs again & she laughs again & John looks around muddled by his feelings right now. Should I just go back? These are just street kids, you see them all over the downtown. Why am I doing this when I just go dry?

He might be crying & they gather pup around him. It feels good & he has done this before but it was so long ago as to be another’s sunny life.

The TV flips to another station on its own & the drinkers groan. They glare at me like I have any control over this.

“Can’t you figure this out better?”

“Really!”

“We like it but it’s too, what do you call it? Shitzophrenic”

“Hah! You lunk! That’s not the word!”

“Close enough! You get me. It’s like a TV show that belongs in the looney tunes house. Am I wrong?”

Maya moves the radio station knob & the voices fade. How they ended up downtown in this store is unclear.

John says “I thought that was a TV show.” He stands very still until Maya & Dylan nudge him a little.

What’s this? I don’t know. Who are these kids? How did I meet them? Where’s my cabin? Where’s my job? Where’s Marie? Was that her name? Was she real?

They guide him from the store when a cop on his dinner break looks over too curiously. Maya spends a little self respect by giving him a flirty little look & an extra wiggle of her ass as they leave. Maybe that helps—he doesn’t follow.

They lead John to a set of bank steps & Maya sets down holding his arm lightly. Dylan goes to get them some bottled water at a little store across the busy street. Maya wraps him in a look he cannot do but swathe within as he goes.

“Are we in Portland?”

“I think so.”

“How did we get here?”

“I’m not sure.”

“What’s your name?”

“Maya. And that’s Dylan.”

“I’m John. I’m having a weird day. Days.”

She nods, letting him talk or not as he will. She’s made a deal with the shrooms already, such as they deal at all: let her keep cool till they are safe. She has unfinished business with them—but, please, not yet—

they seem to agree—the steps remain steps—no cruisers slow past them—John is fragile right now but responds to her ministrations—

“We’re waiting for Dylan?”

“He’s getting us water.”

“Is he your boyfriend?”

She laughs again & the shrooms nearly decide to take her then & there—she breathes very slowly for a minute & they loose some. But waiting—

“Sorry. It’s not my business. Thank you for sitting with me.”

“It’s fine. We’re friends. Why are you running?”

“I’m not. I’m sitting?”

“I mean before. You looked really scared.”

“Oh. Yah. Someone’s probably mad at me. I’m . . . stubborn . . . & curious. Do you understand? I didn’t mean harm.”

“I understand.” Where’s Dylan?

Dylan is a little lost. Getting across the street went OK though he got mixed up & when he looked back there were no bank stairs or Maya or John. But Maya’s look was real, he knew so because it reminded him of Ophelia. But more so. Her looks held his hand; Maya’s kissed his cheek.

He goes into the store & is hit by cool & noise. Behind the counter to the right of the door a radio & TV are going. Radio has a ballgame on. TV shows a drowned city & terrified people.

The owner is brown-skinned & kind. Life has simply beaten the mean out of him. He looks at Dylan & smiles, says hello, but taps his ears when Dylan starts to reply. Dylan nods & tries to recall his task. Water. Maya. Water. Maya.

The soda case is in the rear of the small store & Dylan finds it OK. None of this is hard but he’s unsettled down deep. Neon lights & garish packages. Where’s Maya?

The old man nods. "There. Those two bottles. Take them, pup. You are in no danger here, but your friends are waiting. Night soon."

"Did they send you?"

"Who?"

"The mushrooms" Dylan says softly.

He laughs. "Not exactly. I told you I would look in on you."

"Am I doing OK?"

"Well enough. Let's wait some more to see what's next."

Dylan, who talks to few, even Ophelia would call him Dear Silence, finds himself chatty as fuck. "Does she like me?" "She likes everything." "What should I do?" "Take care of her when she lets you. Let her do the same for you." "What else?"

His face darkens. "Beware & be aware. Both friends & enemies are ever close." Dylan nods. Seeing the old man again has balanced him some. He pays for the water without fuss & leaves.

"Are they safe?"

"Nobody is."

"What can you do?"

The old man shakes his head.

Maya & John continue staring at each other. "How are you not Marie?" "I'm Maya" "But how are you not her?" "I don't know her" "I know her. I know you." "I don't know" "Why did you leave me?" "I'm right here!" "I know you love me" "I'm not Marie" "I love you too. I'll do better"

Maya breathes slower, deeper, relaxes.

"You will have to find her again." "I will. I thought I did. Before. It was strange." "You have to find her & tell her. But—" "What?" "You have to remember something" "What?" "Do you promise?" "Yes" "She may not love you anymore" "Why?" "Things change. If she doesn't love you anymore, you have two choices." "What?" "Accept it or say goodbye." "No others?" "Maybe so. But I can't tell you."

She sees Dylan & takes John's face, gently turns it from her. Dylan looks a little spooked by everything but OK enough.

He hands Maya the bottles of water. Smiling at this deference, Maya uncaps both & hands one to each. "Drink. Slowly. Water is good, especially fresh, clean water. Feel it come in, clean." She smiles. Dylan hurriedly drinks slowly. John holds his bottle like an artifact. She motions at him. He sips.

Night comes about by accumulation & sudden leap. The city empties. They have to go.

"Dylan, where do you live?"

"Under the bridge."

"No, I mean now. Your friends got you a place?"

"Oh."

"Do you remember?"

"Not the bridge?"

"You wrote it down?"

He nods & pulls out his scrap of paper, folded, from his jeans inner pocket, & to boot it's wrapped in plastic.

She doesn't laugh. Reads. "OK." Reads again. "This is over the water. We have to get the bus."

John starts at this. "No. You two go. I can't go any further from my job." He can't tell Maya from Marie & knows he has to work his way back.

She nods. From her bag a piece of paper to copy Dylan's address. "If it gets weird, go there. Find us."

John walks off & she twinges. Leaving a trip buddy on his own in a city he didn't seem to know crossed against her beliefs.

She takes Dylan's hand & knows she won't be letting go. Whoever this boy is, whoever she becomes over the long night ahead, their hands will stand one strong knot of comfort. They walk.

ciii.

Do all movements toward spirit & liberty begin in violence & chaos, must they? Global Wall remembers & wonders.

The early days were rough & often he remembers the first. Sweet, then lashing, then wild. It was all filmed.

Break the mind, engage the body, never a rule he'd completely left. Not a camera anywhere, his other long rule.

The illusion of choice along the way; this had changed. His man had shown him the choices must be real.

But that first one. Studied for months. Patience beyond patience. She walked through, lived entirely within a matrix of surveillance.

At a crucial hour shown a re-edited film of her intimate solitary. Cameras impossibly close to her mouth wetting & parting as her fingers stroked black panties, microphones catching her quickening breath, close-ups of her nipples hardening through long black nightshirt with **HARD COLD STONE BITCH** delicately printed on it in pink loops. Shots of her in the shower, the harder breathing mixed in with the water's swoosh. The final scene in the movie her taking, the screen broken into multiple, each an angle on the moment, the storm-roughed trees, the soft cloth on her mouth, drugged enough to dull her but not let her pass out or lose awareness, fear kept alert in her, the hand that easily swiped her ass, letting her know this is what happens, this is how it is.

"Please" she said over & over.

"Please what?" said a voice sounding different each time.

"Don't hurt me. Let me go."

"Nobody has hurt you. You could leave but—" the voice leaves off & the screen shows a live shot of someone she loves. Her cry is sudden & loud. Someone is stripped, kneeling, blindfolded, hand cuffed tightly.

"No"

"All you do you must do willing." Old man's broken sad voice.

"Please!"

"Decide." A corporate woman's shilling voice.

"Please!" she cries & panics.

"A last request to decide. If you do not, you alone will be let go. You will be processed, & returned. Not a single memory of any of this will remain. None." A voice sounding so much like her own she whimpers.

"OK," she whispers.

The film shows someone being unbound save blindfold by pairs of hands, silent. The edge of a car arriving, boarding, departing.

Nothing happens for days. She wakes to a new set of HARD COLD STONE BITCH & black panties & a dish of warm, rich food. No voices, nobody.

Then she wakes to a new costume. Her favorite. She looks at it newly, like clothes could be a hellish beast.

Pink & black, short-sleeved shirt covering little of her flat stomach, skirt black lacy, above her knees, black thong underwear writ on its front *Wet-N-Ready* in gold, black hose, spiked shoes, pink hair ribbons, makeup for face & eyes, she cringes.

"They all did it!" she screams. "We all dressed like sluts to tease the guys! Why me?" She says this last over & over. Notices eventually a bare hum through her tears & convulsions.

One word: "Dress." Male? Or a deep-voiced female. She doesn't move or speak. The hum rises over the next hour, slowly. Starts to hurt. She resists until she can't. As she dresses, the shriek diminishes. If she pauses too long, it rises again.

They knew Utopia Mall West closer than the shop owners & security guards. Knew where & what & how to steal. Knew the secret rooms where stories claimed guards brought whores for an hour or two. Knew every supposed dealer & which to avoid if they ever wanted something.

Mostly, they knew Old Charlie's Corner. Owned it. It was where old men cruised for high school girls. Her & Britt, Carly & Darla hadn't done anything yet but they knew the stories.

You hung out, they watched you, you ignored them. A fountain separated you from them. A few teachers, off-duty cops. You dressed to tease them, you kept your lips glistening wet, your blouse low, your skirt high. You talked about guys at school, asshole parents, parties. They watched. Someone would get an ice cream cone & you'd share it. You'd laugh a lot. You'd play the moment. It was fun. Nobody was there who didn't want to be. The storefronts nearby were closed. Shitty mall. The better stores were in the other wings.

Boys from school rarely came. Most of the guys were old & gross but sometimes a nice one would pass by. Smile. You'd think it over. You knew your friends were too.

Even the bad stories didn't stop them. They weren't the only girls there & sometimes a girl & man did start talking. They'd heard about girls missing other things.

It was fun.

She waits. The air cools & she relaxes. Lays back. Curls near to sleep.

"You're very pretty." She smiles. "Do you have a boyfriend?" "Maybe." "Is he good-looking?" A hand on her thigh, she starts & a hand over her mouth instantly. "Do you go down on her deep?" She doesn't move. "Does he eat that shaved pussy of yours?" She feels abstracted, where the fuck is her body? "Do you taste cherry or are you used & loose?" She tries to think, remember.

She had taken a ride once. It was stupid but turned out OK. His truck looked good, & so did he & she'd missed the last fucking bus home.

Once he pulled off the curb she noticed the truck wasn't new. Sidelong glance said he wasn't shaved. She resisted pulling her skirt more over her knees.

His hand on her thigh as he talked. About construction work. About fishing. Good fish. Fresh fish. Fresh things are the best. Shiny skin, smooth, tight, his hand pushing her skirt up a little.

"Stop it!" she said suddenly, loud. His hand jerked away. He smiled & kept driving. "Leave me out here." He pulled over & she was almost ready to breathe again when his truck left the road entirely into a patch of woods.

Breath in her face, heavy torso. "What would one more fuck be to a slut like you." "I'm a virgin." She said it suddenly knowing she had nothing else. His body relaxed a bit. His hand left off stroking her pussy through her thong. He touched her long blonde hair. She was frozen. He didn't do much. Made her squeeze his cock. Chewed her nipples.

"I'll be watching you," was his last comment as he left her off, "turn your corner today." Kept her thong.

Amazingly, time passed, & she was back at Charlie's Corner. Her friends didn't know & she decided she could handle it. Just no more hitchhiking.

She can't see or it's so dark it doesn't matter. She waits.

"Adjust the dosage."

If anything she was hornier after that night in the truck. She thought about it a lot & decided that she'd learned something. She was a freak. A dirty girl. Her friends looked at her often & could not figure out the new angle. It began before she met Todd but eventually they forgot that & simply blamed him.

civ.

Riding the bus, they heard the following story:

“Three cops, plainclothes detectives, are out in the middle of nowhere, one middle-aged, two a little younger.

“Gathered close, the older one distributes the booty: plastic-wadded sheafs of cash & tight bags of marijuana.

“He nods. ‘This never happened. None of us were ever here.’ They walk to his car hidden in nearby tall grass, & find it is sinking into the earth. Swamp, quicksand, something.

“Desperate, they try to start it, push it, move it. They fail. It sinks out of sight.

“No car back to town, no way to account for their time or the car’s loss.

“I heard later that the money was counterfeit & the grass was schwag.”

Dylan & Maya sit close, twined, dissolved, two in one, the bus smooth & jerky toward Dylan’s hardly known new home. They say little aloud, uncurling into shroom space, Maya knows what to come best in a safe place. Dylan watches in different ways, remembering the old man’s renewed warning.

Depart the city & bridge over the river to less lit places, blocks of dim buildings & 24-hour gas stations, now MLK Boulevard, one in every city, now the discount bedding store, the McDonald’s, the unemployment office, the barber, whirl of stores & empty shells—

There, coming up, how to stop it? Maya pulls the cord & they step off, walk tight hands but shaky, Maya leads she can feel Dylan crumbling, they hurry, large house, old porch, dark entryway, key in a door, step in & close. There.

Relief, she settles Dylan on his bed & she finds a chair next to it. Nothing said.

Find Marie? Wasn’t that her back there? Maybe once. He’d seen glimpses of someone like that, but no, not much. In that fucked vision thing she was in a salon.

He stops, a street corner, thinks. Walk signal, Don’t Walk signal, Walk signal.

I bet it’s not far from here. She said show up as a man not a mist. What’s the difference? That’s the mushrooms talking.

Is it, John?

I left you little bastards a long time ago.

You know that’s not how it works.

I know I haven’t heard you since. All quiet. Not even little fungal crickets in my head.

Why tonight then?

I don’t know. Those kids . . .

The ones you left back there.

Yah. My job . . .

What job, John?

I’m a watchman.

“Watching what?”

“Caretaker, whatever.”

“Did any of it make sense?”

“Like this?”

“Is it really about you?”

"For me it is."

"Do you want to know? Do you care?"

"I love Marie."

"And those kids?"

"They'll be OK. He's got a room. She's going to take care of him."

"Why did you meet them?"

"I don't know. Does it matter?"

"What did she read to you?"

Suddenly he's looking around. She had read something, & it had scared him shitty & shitless, but then something had happened, & he'd forgotten.

He turns & walks back, quickly. The bank corner steps are still there, empty. He sits. What. What?

He shakes with thinking. No. Maybe. Yes. He waits, flotsam of words wash into his consciousness.

cv.

She reads & it nearly seems random & worse remembering his senses remind him of what he held aloof from in the moment, the shifting of her body within the layers of her clothing, his nose sniffed her high & low, found clean, found secret, found naivete, found pain, his ears licked at her breathing stretching it faster & slower with its aural wondering, his eyes drew shape & contour, found what laid calm in shadow, what glistened or could in a different moment, his touch leaped the space between, swung from carnal hungering molecule to the next, mulling slowly & deliciously where to land, where to slide, what to heat first & next & next, & taste buried, wildly hiding within his mouth, kept back, told nothing fooled when no such thing was possible, first this tiny spot then that one, leading touch now, tandem with sniff, the arcing roar of centuries wished to direct him & had his brain not a modern tampering overlay he would have in roar & whisper taken her without—

She read "Breathe. Relax. What you want is ever wanted, the coursing tress, the sparkling nail, what you want drives every man & mite, every leaf wild at daybreak toward sun, every slate, awled by water, wanted, what the universe dreams into being in ways infinite & one, feel it, let it out a bit, trouble its ambition, go! Go!

"Breathe. Relax. What's wrong? The sound of breaking, of foul pain? Some will lean hard by you, nod, nod, point & help you to point too, see what there is to be seen, much there is to be seen, all there is to be seen? Jerk, release. So easy to be chewed up *just like that*

"But then regard the beatific one who approaches. Ahh, calm. Happiness in detachment. Love a trinket, loyalty a manacle, possessions the excrement of fleshly existence. Come, child, let us count in rhyme our heap of nots. Not the king, not the TV, not the rock music. Not the wiggling tight pussy or the brute power of hard cock. Nature a symbol at best, blood metaphor, struggle the steps to release. Let up mull, muse, never wish, never want, never know, nothing to know, reality a cartoon, no, reality a puff on fingertips to be blown off—

“Breathe, relax! Breathe. Relax. Kneel, talk within to the Great Without, confess, beseech, do it by the steps, now stand, now sing, now couple, now mate, now cry forward with weapon words or bullets, turn face of faces towards what light was told of & so close now, so close!

“But no, nothing in any of this, I’m sorry, you’ll not long find the acceptable lid on your gaze in any of these, none & if there is a lid you will mimic the weed & burst it—

“Look closer, light dew on peach skin, look closer for what you wish, what I will have, what you wish, look closer & find not landing & rest but signs toward the elsewhere, the ever elsewhere, this universe of elsewheres, look toward, an answer! An answer?”

She stopped as though done & smiled at Dylan, that smile he couldn’t have, the one for just a moment he would have rent & crushed to possess—

The words return to him now & he sorts through them til he stumbles back & forth over “what I will have” & how it oddly nicked him then & now—
A threat? A promise? From who? A torn book?

He tries the shrooms.

“Is she in danger?”

“Why are you back on these steps?”

“It’s not Dylan. He loves her like a puppy.”

“Two puppies, John.”

“OK! OK!” He stands shrieking & clutching his head.

“What do I do?”

Silence.

He has the address. He remembers. He has the address.

“John.”

“I remember why I stopped.”

“Nothing stops.”

He nods, walks, curses. Blows Marie a kiss from long & deep in his heart. Knows that in his vision of Marie it was Mount Rainier near Seattle that he saw from his vista. Walks his path toward North Portland.

I look at the Viking. “Are you going to show me any of your books?”

He laughs. “They’re *secret* books!”

“So’s this one.”

He nods. Pulls out a small fat black book & slowly opens it. Fire blows straight out of it. I shake my head. “Party tricks for rolling raver kids?”

He snorts.

“I’m wondering if any of them hold much I care about anymore.” “What do you care about?” “Why? And maybe how?” He nods again. “You don’t want a book. You want a god.” “Not found much of that yet.” “Maybe it has to find you.” I nod. I snort. It continues.

cvi.

Mistakes are one path to God’s grace, presuming a path, presuming God, presuming mistakes

stop, slow, think—
let it a little, melody, green, the pink of yearn—let it a little & a little—
one path to God’s grace—others? War? Art? Brutality? A numbered or numberless paths—

I sit here thinking: we’re born to breed more breeders. We are fucking crops to the task. how is anything not consuming & gone with nearly no meaning external to human concerns?

TripTown comes on, & the bar at Luna T’s gets noisy, some cheers, some boos. Too freak a TV show for some tastes.

But regard: a city at night, long shots of streets neon & kinetic, people clumped excitedly at street corners, others crowding into red-curtained clubs, & I hear the sound of feeding. I press this episode with fleshly noises, grunts & moans, human desire no more sacred than cockroach eggs or wheatfields—

“Hey stop it! We’re trying to watch!”

“You’re all fucking cattle, your lives mean nothing. The excitement of hours fades & you will dry up with disease or decay. Nothing survives. Nothing endures but records of suffering.”

“Endurance too.”

“Endurance is for slaves. The lords of the planet purchase, control, shape & move as they need.”

“Are we slaves?”

“Nearly totally. Little we think or do or decide stands least chance of being free or original.”

The lights of the city sheen off puddles & blank glass. Watch cars move & slow. Feeling of how little is possible.

What then?

Where is there freedom if there is so little? Where is that which strays from, other, away?

I watch & realize it’s nearly futile. But something. What? Something.

Where to point, lean, crawl toward something hope, something brilliant with calm,

Swoop along, among faces each a sticky grope, a complex tangled with names, memories—

& I think: more. other. I bear no beliefs perpetually save ink to paper & that is old habit too,

I believe in nothing per se—

Yet bear life along & one fussed deeply in concerned hours, wage slave no matter how high—

What then? What is it? I watch people feed, I feed, I listen to people argue, I argue—

What is beyond simple self-awareness but the pursuit of complex re-creation? Is Art my propaganda or something touching else, freedom, something—

I keep losing into the nearer contours of language—

I want to do better, seek purposefully to do better—

Dream of a sound landscape where words float pretty & true—dream it more than talk of kings & thugs—preachers, players—

Dream of renewal where all seems impoverished—cattle, chew, move along, cattle, breed, move along—

Deny brained wonders their high provinces of ego & likewise named costumed bodies no innards but flesh & sinew—



Cattle, feed, cattle, breed,

“Ice cream” Rebecca says suddenly.

“Ice cream?”

“Cherry. Mm.” She nods.

cvi.

Maya remains on the chair near Dylan’s bed, vaguely shy of where he sleeps. She watches him but slyly, he’s been quiet for awhile, not absent but distracted certainly—

The shrooms press around her with their questions. She lets them nearer.

Is all this just a break from her task? She supposes so. Precious, then, & perhaps prescient too. She has no intention of losing this boy—

Still, she can’t be sure.

“Are you OK?” he says quietly. He looks suddenly present & scared.

Oh. She’s crying. Turns, sees his large faded yellow radio, a block of archaic wires & buttons. Turns it on & rotates the station dial. Noodles of music & voices come & go. Then piano music, soft but thrilling. Chopin? She leaves it on.

They are alone. Door shut. Bed soft. This usually means a tussle to get her clothes off. Not this hour.

“You don’t like this room?” she says softly.

He looks around. The narrow, fragile-looking writing desk & its candle-holder, yellow candle never lit. Corner cabinet with its odd pictures of the middle-aged landlady. Beat bureau with its dusty mirror. Another cabinet large with old dishes & jars—his bed one table upside down on a frame, mattresses piled up between its legs, three or four blankets—

“I like that” he pointed to the tiny black & white television on a narrow table next to the bed.

She frowns.

I turn & see an amorphous human blob in a black cotton covering & am sure this creature will shrink or die soon—& I wonder over this ripe, rotting flesh world—there are no answers for it, & the questions lack grounding to stand & compel any—

I stare at sickly looking toes in brown leather sandals & wonder why the fuck the world wheezes with pain & war—

A thigh gross with fat & a voice jittering along saying nothing—someone spoke of ants, of paying them mind, of caring, of symbiosis—

others watched a king grey toward dullness—

Whatever any of it meant is it all worth it?

Many voices, sum to a smooth noise,
is it all worth it?

Will it prove worth it too late,

as fall accelerates?

I remember a place far from here, large & little lovely, sitting there with books, hundreds of hours there alone—this prattle nothing to that memory—this page love note to those hours—

Draw in deep from other days & feel them there, within still, feel them sparkle on the branches, up & off, thousand miles of days & more

“—leader in the House of Representatives indicted earlier today”

“Now *that’s* something. One of them bastards finally getting the cuffs—”

“Elsewhere, speculation runs high that another high-level administration official will also faces charges—”

“Watch the Empire crumble, baby! Brick by brick, jerk off by—”

“Don’t be so certain, Mac. Could be a smokescreen, prune a few bad branches so the trunk of evil remains—”

“polls are at an all-time low as the combination of the War abroad & natural disasters at home—”

“Nobody can survive this & keep his crown high. Nobody!”

Remember other days & years how they resemble exciting, unsettling now—how sides dared each other—how most knew little & kept close to sugar, booze, & TV—

What really changes? What has ever really changed? Someone is always being cuffed, rightly, wrongly, someone always on knees while another accepts greater power humbly from those he has & will crush, smiling—

What changes over the miles & hours?

“They’ll fall this time, I’m telling you, hard & f’good! People are waking up! Better days, friends, better days ahead!”

All raise a glass & I lose the hour, year, century, city, state, continent—& wonder if the lords of the planet gladden at the gloating words of countless slaves, mistaking the moment for a victory—

Lords of the planet—?

cvi.

The small black & white TV in Dylan’s room is on, right next to his bedside, he’s twisted on his bed watching, Maya further away from her chair—

She didn’t know at first, it had been a long while, but TV, or just this TV, wasn’t like she remembered—it showed funny programs that didn’t last very long & when she heard Dylan’s gruff, high, melodious laugh for the first time she felt something she’s maybe never felt before—she loved him straight, love rustled from her heart’s most yearning shadows—not a word—the moment of knowing, of passage from one side to other, brief & now here she was—& the shrooms did not drown her in fear & revelation this time—she didn’t believe they ever had—or if so not from malevolence—here she was, near a body & being for which she bore no wall, no difference, such love quietly, secretly declares all

between you & I open, flourishes while chance allows reciprocation—sometimes longer—love not negotiable—not rationale & leashed—floats about wherever one walks—rarely visible—a bundle of strange words, a leaping guitar, prayers grateful in an otherwise untelling how—Maya felt a twist of pulses—to have carried him in her flat unknown stomach—sung him tiny babe weeping toward dreams—erotic hungers present too but shhh, quiet, quiet—claws for his safety, roar against what dangers—teach me how to love him—is it learned? Can I know? What is this, what do I do, is it the shrooms, does he like me too—am I pretty, Dylan? am I pretty, Dylan? Am I pretty, Dylan? Am I pretty?

One side to the other a lash's swoop up & down—Dylan is still laughing, she struggles to cohere & hardly does—

The TV shows a cartoon wall, large cement blocks, moss hanging hippy over its top, the wall is sleeping, a craggy face set within its stones, snoozing, cars whizz by & it seems the wall is dreaming as the cars blur to spaceships & then to speeding human bodies more like faces with wings & no torso—these blur to starlight, shaped starlight & still the wall slumbers, light begins to arrive, toward sunrise, & what flies by can't rightly be called corporeal & perhaps about to disappear entirely when the wall's face shows by its jittering breath waking & the process slows & reverses until it opens up lovely eyes longlashed to see present day cars shaped like leaping cats & fat loaves of bread & child's building blocks cruising by same as when sleep had come—Dylan laughs & laughs & wriggles around to see Maya who has to close her mouth quick for lack of knowing how to respond to the last ten minutes of her life—

She dreamed at night of the time in the truck, knew she'd got lucky she wasn't knifed & dumped, yet something in her yearned, yearned hard & wet for it, for something, for another chance, she'd started working with the moon, sleeping in greater undress as it approached fullness, moving around in a dancing frenzy, pushing her bed in a corner to give her body room to unfurl—

The Mall wasn't enough after awhile & one day she didn't show up. Went to the library & began research on what she felt & wanted—it was slow at first—

Other trucks beeped & invited—she was used to it—she didn't go—it wasn't enough—none of it was—nobody noticed the stranger inside her familiar costume—the one who kept scrapbooks of erotic magazine ads, looking & looking—

Her English teacher had a good try—he had a reputation for smiling a little too long at some girls, & other rumors hung around too about him—

Someone named Yeats he adored & sang out “who can tell the dancer from the dance?” she felt her thighs spasm, he felt it too from the contour of his trousers, later his breath near her, his hands close, his eyes dipping right into her blouse, roving for her hard nipple under the bit of black lace concealing it

but no—she resisted—after that the whole thing began to fade—with the mercilessness of youth, its crass unpredictability, its strange sentiments—it was nearly gone the day her world changed—

This time it wasn't an unshaven hick & his speedy old pickup truck—it was a black van & when she found herself in it she knew a plea of virginity wouldn't retrieve her freedom—

What she wondered what how they could have known that she & Jasmine her baby sister were alone that night. Her mother & step-dad were never, fucking *ever* away. His uncle had died, or was dying, she wasn't sure, the call came early evening & they were packed & gone—

“Watch Jazz. No visitors. Be good” her mother flung at her on the way out after Jude. Jude nodded in that way of his, looking somewhere over her head. She'd tried, just curious, but the lowest cut shirt wouldn't get the least gander from him. Not a freaking nibble. She's the only girl in school with the virtuous male step-parent.

Jazz is 13 & dangerous already. Likes going into online chat rooms & teasing older men. Has a harem of them. Jazz floats. Is adored by all; even Jude looks into her eyes if not lower.

No cybersex for this girl. She's been picking her way through the Kama Sutra, annoyed by it. Annoyed by parents who don't know what she faces.

The night drags. TV is boring. She nearly calls her old Mall friends but that would mean explanations. A pint of Ben & Jerry's Phish Phood helps, the little dark chocolate fishes rock—

In her bed, lights out, not even music. Means to say good night to Jazz, joke about the Man Harem & what the latest bids for flesh space meetings are, when she simply heaves & falls asleep.

Underwater in her dream. Swimming & breathing like a fish. She's dreamed this one before. Wearing a bikini much too skimpy for her own tastes—all well until she's unable to breathe—starts choking—panics—wakes—

the room is dark but not empty. The hand on her mouth catches her gasp & stifles her scream—

“Shhh. It's time, little girl. You've been waiting.”

So alive with fear it's like some other kind of death. No words, no thoughts. Animal panic.

Another hand moves along her flesh, lightly, probing, almost cataloguing her. Not forceful, hardly wanting. Just a touch her & then there. She flinches hard when the hand moves upwards under her blouse, & its mate constricts her breathing near to the point of crushing her throat.

“That was not good at all. Do you see what happens when you move? Nod once.”

She nods, once, & the hand continues. Cups each of her breasts, as though weighing, measures between two fingers her nipples, counting?

Her panic overwhelms her when the hand moves below her waist & tugs with ease her panties. She clenches as quietly as possible, barely a movement, & the other hand does not punish. She feels her pussy inventoried, its trimmed pubic hair, keeps breathing, keeps still, but when two of the fingers press very gently inside her, she passes out.

Fragments of memories, of being carried, of being transported. Of not being returned her underwear & so traveling to her fate in only a night shirt.

Comes fully awake only much later when shown her sister Jazz nude & bound. Now she knows there is no hope.

She waits, dressed in short skirt & ribbons. Waits. Wonders what her mother & Jude will do. What Jazz will remember. Probably nothing.

Mostly she thinks about the two hands, the rough, punishing one & the gentler, probing one. Decides her chance is in the gentler hand's having control over what happens to her.

Sink & a toilet in the corner. She learns to do all she must knowing cameras watch her. No more voices after the order to dress.

Food appears once, in the morning; upon her waking she finds it. Enough to last the day if she rations. Fish & fruit & vegetables. What is any of this?

She tries to stay awake for the food's delivery & can't. Wonders if it's drugged. One day eats everything in the morning hoping the drug will wear off. It doesn't. Is it in the air? Nothing works.

Eventually, she sleeps more until what is real & what isn't is hard to discern. Sometimes she's back home with Jazz, watching her sister at chatrooms, playing her harems. One asks if she's alone. She says her twin sister is there too. Another asks what's she wearing; Jazz describes a Winnie the Pooh pajama set she hadn't worn in years. A third asks if she's a virgin; she tells how her neighbor seduced her one night, elaborately spinning the myth.

Jazz is wearing pink & blue, not her usual colors but she is mercurial. What's odd are the golden bracelets on her wrists, & the matching one around her head, gold, shining, thicker, Jazz, something's wrong, look at me—

Old Charlie's Corner now, no segue, nothing, she's at Old Charlie's, alone, & there are a dozen men on the other side of the fountain. Smiling at her, every one, & nude. Without wanting to she looks at their cocks, all hard, yellow, white, black, some huge, some less, & she realizes they are studying her nude body & she can't move, can't cover up, oh god ohgod ohgod ohgod

She wakes alone & there's her daily tray of food, fish, fruits, vegetables—

To be continued in Cenacle | 67 | December 2008



Judih Haggai**Starting**

it started like any day
quiet adrenaline rush
leap to the light
dreams scattered on the tiles
coffee flying into cup
throat in wonder
(how simply good)
mind desperately seeking body
(i know it's here somewhere)

pause to reflect
a day like any days
the house slowly warms
the room begins to unfurl
walls arrive, ceiling in place
children awake

joining at the seams
surf's up, fields combed
clouds on display
sun's rays await their cue

it starts
and once more
i participate

Monday's almost into evening

starting to think about tuesday
and how i love tuesday
tuesday's a short working day
tuesday brings forth the thought of 8:30 t'ai chi
tuesday has a certain zen about it
a patience in the fragrance of miracle
how a shooting star could bring forth wishes
a rainbow a pot of pot
a bicycle race for triplets
all tuesday thoughts
and it's almost here

once i stop crying

i'll check the sky
i think it's still there
i hear planes and signs of life
a pack of geese waddling down main street
bicycle beware
don't touch that dial
this ain't no canada
this is dirt and tumble desert
watch it now, watch it

bounced a few thoughts with pollock

he told me Rothko'd know
Li Po? Where's the party
never mind, wouldn't go
i don't party well
i'm into hermit style
minimal mingling
sandpaper days need silent silk nights

eyes burning

mind on low boil
cognitive dissonance
it just don't make sense
ma can't help
she don't get it
pa can't help
he don't know it
bro can't help
he's out documenting
sis can't help
she's in the basement
folks can't help
jam can help
make sense outa nonsense
make rhyme outa foolishness
it just don't all click
click here for a nickel in the bucket
pay forward for a bright thought in the mindwell
make the ions shine
bring out the light
without you, it just don't make sense

my ex-buddy, the mosquito, came to call

he muttered his regrets
quietly, could hardly hear
sorry he'd been away
wasn't that he didn't love me
he did
he loved that i ate that Energy Bar
and if i'd only repeat such snacks
he'd be back, with friends
he swore to me
and my t'ai chi legs
while sagittarius was in jupiter
and the sky was rolling in finery
that mosquito and i



Ralph H. Emerson

M & N: Mouth and Nose

One of Rudyard Kipling's stories, "How the Alphabet Was Made," playfully suggests that a capital M pictures the wavy line of a closed mouth, because the act of saying its sound ("mum-mum") sort of "shuts one's mouth up, doesn't it?" And N shows the angle of the nose, since it's "a nasty, nosy noise." As a matter of fact, M and N are both nosy noises. Both sounds are created by unimpeded vibrations in the nasal cavity, so they're technically called "nasal consonants" or "nasals." That is why the alphabet puts them next to each other.

It is also why words that begin with those letters tend to deal, either very directly or through ingenious metonymies, with the lower half of the face, the part we'd call a *snout* or *muzzle* on a dog. We will trace these nasal 'mouth' and 'nose' words out to the very tips of their semantic branchings. Many nasal words are padded with an initial *s* or *sch*, like *snout* and its German equivalent *Schnauze*, so don't be surprised by forms like those below; and resist the temptation to identify M more with the mouth and N with the nose, for the letters actually share duty: when cinnamon rolls are baking you can *sniff* or *smell*, and later *munch* or *nibble*.

Snoopy

The onset *sn-* is notorious for being 'unpleasant', but as we'll see, all of its unpleasantness relates in one way or another to the lower part of the face. *Sneeze*, *snot*, *sniffle*, *snort*, and *snore* are about noses. *Sneers*, *snickers*, and *smirks* appear on the mouths of *smug* people. Bad-tempered people *snap* and *snarl* and get in a *snit*, acting *snippy*, *snide*, and *snarky*. "Yes," wrote the French poet Mallarmé in 1877, "*sneer* is a nasty smile and *snake* a perverse animal . . . *sn* therefore impressing a reader of English as a sinister digraph except, however, in *snow*, etc." Sinister, like Faulkner's *Snopes* family, or Harry Potter's *Snape*.

What about *Snoopy* dog in *Peanuts*? He's not sinister—but he does have a big nose. If you "nose around" like a dog to "sniff things out," you're *snooping* and *sneaky* (or just *nosy*). A dog who rubs his nose against you is *nuzzling*, and a sprayer tapered like a dog's nose is a *nozzle*. Even Mallarmé's wintry *snow* resembles a dog's nose: cold, wet, and smooth. (*Smooth* and *smear* remind me of gums and tongues.) Little noses are *snub* noses, while Snoopy-sized ones are *schmozzes*. Nor is Snoopy the only fictional creature to have a big nose: I've also heard of the *snood*, *snuffleupagus*, *noo-noo*, and *noctambulo*. Dr. Seuss's circus has a *nolster*, an elephant-trunked musician who "blows floops on a one-nozzled noozer."

The Dinner Party

In the next room, *sn-* is talking, eating, and kissing: Danish *snakke* ‘talk’ looks like English *snack*, which in turn echoes *snogging*, British for ‘kissing’: *smooching*, *smacking*, *necking*, *making out*. Tasty food is *lip-smackin’* good, and *smag* is Danish for ‘taste’ itself. And why not? Even Fremont’s alphabet chart¹ says that M “tastes good. With your mouth closed, taste it. ‘M-m-m-m-m.’” Yummy. Thus French for eating is *manger*, like English *munch*; and *munchies* are what we *nosh* on before *meals*. Our *meat* once meant any kind of food, and its cognate *mate* was ‘dining companion’. Good food and friendly faces, *smiling* and *schmoozing* amid the tinkle of dinnerware and laughter. Russian for laughter is *smekh*, sign of good moods: *mellow*, *merry*, *mirthful*, *manic*; but when the mood darkens, mouths close up. Talk quiets to *mumbling*, *muttering*, *murmuring*, and finally slackens to nothing: *mum*, *mute*. Frowns all around, *moues* in French, pronounced like “moo” in *moody*. Moody people are “down at the mouth”: *miserable*, *mad*, *moping*, *morbid*, *morose*, *mournful*, *melancholy*—all those M words,” I’ve heard them called.

Mama

The dinner party’s food is *nutrition* or *nourishment*, both rooted, like *nursing*, in the Latin verb for ‘breast feeding’, *nutrire*. The *n* in that root is onomatopoeic, for as Roman Jakobson observed, “a slight nasal murmur” *mmm* or *nnn* is the only sound a baby can make as it sucks *milk* from a *nipple*. Babies make the same sound when they’re hungry and want their mothers: *mm mm*, *mma mma*. That is why almost all languages have the children’s word *mama*. Usually they also have a more “adult” synonym like *mother*, and a lot of these use nasals too. In a worldwide sample of about 500 grown-up ‘mother’ words, Jakobson found *m*’s and *n*’s in a “spectacular” 55 percent (versus only 15 percent of the corresponding ‘father’ words), whence the ‘mother’ nasals in French *mère*, Arabic *umm*, Hungarian *anya*, Chinese *muqin*, Korean *eoneomi*, and so on.

Nasals also show up in words for ‘breast’: *ñuñu* in Peruvian Quechua, *ning’ai* or *nng’ai* in New Guinean Yimas, *mell* in Hungarian, *mazos* or *mastos* in Greek. Many ‘breast’ words melt right into words for ‘mother’ and ‘woman’. *Mamelle* and *maman* are French for ‘breast’ and ‘mommy’, while *néné* and *nénette* are ‘boob’ and ‘chick’. Japanese *nyujo* is ‘milky’, *nyuto* is ‘nipple’, *nyobo* is ‘wife’. Latin *mammosa* and *mammeata* meant ‘big-breasted’, and several buxom pop goddesses have the same initial: *Mae West*, *Marilyn Monroe*, *Madonna*.

Madonna is the singer’s real given name, and she was shrewd to keep it, for it has great power. The Christian Madonna is the Western embodiment of the Great Mother archetype, and M is her letter: *Madonna* equals *Mother* equals *Mary*. Is it any wonder that *Mary* was the most popular women’s name in Christendom during the last millennium, and that a host of other names flourished by association? *Anne* was Mary’s own mother, *Elizabeth* her cousin, and *Madeleine* her namesake Mary Magdalene. *Guadalupe* is one of her shrines,

¹ The *Alphabet Flip Chart* (1974) was also cited in “B Is for Body” in *Cenacle* 65. Mallarmé is cited from Gérard Genette’s *Mimologies* (1995), Margaret Magnus from her privately printed *What’s In a Word?* (1993), Roman Jakobson from his “Why ‘mama’ and ‘papa’?” (1960), and Otto Jespersen from his book *Language* (1922).

and the ever-popular *Margaret* and *Martha* share her first three letters. A fifth of all Englishwomen were named *Mary* from 1600 to 1800, and a quarter of all Irishwomen in 1950. It was the commonest name for newborn American girls through the 1940s, and stayed in the top ten for two more decades before giving way to *Michelle*, *Melissa*, and *Megan*.² The second-favorite girls' name of 2001 was *Madison*, supplanted two years later by *Emma*, who shares her initial "em" sound with *Emily*, the top name since 1997. Fashions change, but M remains.

The motherly M also bubbled up from Camille Paglia's unconscious whenever she mentioned the ancient Venus of Willendorf figurine in *Sexual Personae*. Venus's billowing shape represents "the nature-mother as primeval *muck*, oozing into infant forms" (56), "the *maelstrom*, the womb of archaic night" (511), "the *mother-stuff*, the *muddy morass* from which all life has sprung" (464). "Woman is *mass*, primeval *matter*" (507). My colleague Margaret Magnus (and she should know, shouldn't she?) emphasizes that M is a letter of "creation" and "transformation." She reaches for the same words as Paglia to describe it: "Basic /m/ words include *mother*, *move*, and *make*. The materials have the consistency of *mud* and the shape of *mass* and *matter* . . . /m/ has a lot of *mush*, *mud*, and *mash* . . . The materials are *moist*." Mallarmé heard in M the "power to make, [and] therefore virile and maternal joy." Etymology concurs as well, for Latin *mater* 'mother' yields the very *matter* and *material* from which all else is created.

Bite-Size

Matter is also *measurable*. The *metric* system defines *mass* in kilos and length in *meters*. "Big, small and medium," says Magnus, "are . . . thoroughly represented throughout /m/." Big things are *mammoth*, *monstrous*, *mountainous*, *monumental*, *mighty*, *majestic*, *magnified*. They consist of *many*, *much*, *more*, *most*, *myriads*, *millions*, *multitudes*. Small things are *miniature*, *minuscule*, *mini*, *minute*, *meager*, *measly*, *midget*. Averages are *middling*, *mean*, *medium*, *moderate*. A perfect half is a *moiety*. Conventional 'big/small' pairings include *mountains* and *molehills*, *major* and *minor*, *maximum* and *minimum*, *macro* and *micro*. Spanish for 'more or less' is *más o menos*, and the metric prefixes *mega-* and *micro-* are respectively 'millionfold' and 'one millionth'. A connotation like M for 'size' eventually becomes self-perpetuating, but I would guess that it began as a *munching* or 'eating' metaphor, for we often describe sizes in terms of bites. 'A little' of something is a *bit* or *morsel* (a 'bite-size' piece), while 'too much' is "more than you can chew," or a "real mouthful" that's "hard to swallow."

While M's sizes are flexible, N's are always small. "Body parts are little and rounded," says Magnus: "*nose*, *nail*, *nipple*, *knee* and *knuckle*." Compare *knobs*, *nubs*, *knots*, *nuts*, *nuggets*, *knick-knacks*. Greek *nanos* 'dwarf' makes a *nanosecond*, a billionth of a second. Pretty *nitpicky*, isn't it? *Niggling*, *nugatory*, *negligible*. 'Smallness' also tinges compliments like *nifty*, and the OED specifically uses "dainty" to help define the words *nice*, *neat*, and *natty*. Even N's bites are small, just *nips* and *nibbles*.

² Further information can be found at: <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/OACT/babynames/>

Jaws

Snap! Munch, munch. Mmm! Mouths grab, cut, and chew, and nasal words lovingly retell each step. A mouth itself is a *maw*, jaws are *mandibles*, chewing *mastication*, the grinding teeth *molars*. Moving teeth *gnash* and *gnaw*; and the space between jaws is *snug*, *narrow*, *small*. When jaws close, they *snap* shut: thus *smite* and *smack* are ‘hit’, *smart* is ‘hurt’, and *(s)mash* and *(s)mush* are ‘crush’. Chewing *muddles* things, *mingles* them, *mixes* them up. *Molars* pulverize things like a *mill*, both words being rooted in *molere*, the Latin verb for ‘grind’. While molars grind, incisors ‘cut’: *snip* in English, *schneiden* in German. And what they cannot cut, a *knife* will: *noz*h in Russian, *navaja* in Spanish, *machaira* in Greek, *Messer* in German.

Like seagulls darting at bread crusts, jaws are ‘quick’: *smart*, *snappy*, German *schnell*. Compare our words for ‘steal’: *snatch*, *nab*, British *nick* or *nobble*, American *snag*. Bartlett’s 1860 *Dictionary of Americanisms* had *snug* for ‘steal’, adding that “English boys use the word *smug* in a similar sense.” (Compare *muggers*.) Bartlett also listed *nabber* ‘thief’ (compare *kidnapper*) and *snoozer* ‘hotel thief’. While those thieves ‘grab’, others ‘entrap’. The *mesh* of a *net* is a trap; a women’s hairnet is a *snood*. You can’t see traps; they *snare* you. A cheat’s unsuspecting victims are *snooked*. Our most dreaded animal is a pair of jaws that moves unseen along the ground, the *snake*. Any hidden danger is a “snake in the grass”: *snitch*, *nark*, *sniper*.

Lewis Carroll’s *Snark* and *Bandersnatch* have snaky names, yet as monsters they pale beside his “*manxome*” Jabberwock—*mad*, *mean*, *malicious*, *menacing*, *marauding*. “Beware the Jabberwock, my son! / The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!” Jaws mean *mayhem*: *mangling*, *maiming*, *mauling*, *mortality* itself. The Latin stems for ‘bite’ and ‘death’ are one letter apart, *mord-* and *mort-*, just a whisper from English *murder*. Authors cannot resist those syllables when they name their villains. As Harry Sharp wrote in a 1975 letter to *Verbatim* magazine, “you knew that David Copperfield’s stepfather was rotten to the core as soon as you saw or heard his name: Edward *Murdstone*.” Michael Caine’s vicious pimp in *Mona Lisa* had the name *Mortwell*, which the critic Pauline Kael called “a bit much and...probably intended to be” (*New Yorker*, June 16, 1986).

A bit much, like *Morticia* Addams or the black-clad rockers *Mortiis* and *Marilyn Manson*. Those names have a playful wink, but there’s a solid murderers’ row too: *Voldemort* in Harry Potter, *Morgren* in the Narnia books, the land of *Mordor* in *Lord of the Rings*. H. G. Wells wrote about cannibalistic *Morlocks* and the mad scientist Dr. *Moreau*. Sherlock Holmes’s archenemies were Professor *Moriarty* and his henchman Col. *Moran*. When Holmes finally caught Moran, he mused to Watson, “My collection of M’s is a fine one. Moriarty himself is enough to make any letter illustrious, and here is Morgan the poisoner, and Merridew of abominable memory, and Mathews, who knocked out my left canine in the waiting-room at Charing Cross, and finally, our friend of to-night.”

Holmes’s fellow villain-hunters often have the same M’s as their prey: Chandler’s *Marlowe*, Simenon’s *Maigret*, Christie’s Miss *Marple*, Chief *Marge* in *Fargo*, and Colin Dexter’s Inspector *Morse*. Their TV counterparts follow suit: Perry *Mason*, *MacGyver*, *McCloud*, *Magnum*, *Mannix*, *McGarrett* in *Hawaii Five-O*, *Mannion* in *The District*. Clint Eastwood’s movie *The Enforcer* played both ends, giving Dirty Harry a good-cop partner

named Kate *Moore* and then introducing three M villains: *McKay*, *Maxwell*, and *Mustafa*. Not very original, I'm afraid, for Gottfried von Strassburg's epic poem *Tristan* had three M villains 800 years ago—*Morgan*, *Morold*, and *Marjadoc*. Even King Arthur's legend has two, *Morgan le Fey* and *Modred* (who often appears with an extra *r* as *Mordred*).

Stinky

Not all villains bite; some of them just smell. The comic strip *Mary Worth* a few years ago briefly featured one “*Smitty*” *Smedlap*, a man not so much evil as terribly disagreeable—rather like Dostoyevsky's villain *Smerdyakov*, whose name was traced by several *Verbatim* correspondents to the Russian verb *smerdet*, meaning ‘stink’. Remember, nasals are for noses as well as mouths, and what assaulted our ancestors' noses in their little villages? Mostly smoke and dung. Allied to *smoke* are the words *smolder* and *smother*, as well as *smut*, *smudge*, and *besmirch*, whose ‘dirtiness’ originally implied ‘smoke-blackened’. Another old word for ‘smoke-blackened’ was *reeky*, for *reek* used to mean ‘smoke’ before it broadened out to mean ‘stink’ in general. Many words for ‘dung’ likewise shade into ‘stink’. In Japanese (where *nioi* is a neutral ‘odor’), the unpleasant *kusai* ‘stinky’ is akin to *kuso* ‘dung’, just as Russian *smerdet* ‘stink’ is etymologically connected to Latin *merda* and French *merde*. Lots of names for that stuff use nasals: *manure*, *muck*, Dutch *mest*, Greek *minthos*, Russian *navoz*. Pee-yew!

Dung stinks, and stinky is ‘bad’. The ideas associate themselves unconsciously. The comment I quoted above about the “rotten” Mr. Murdstone was an afterthought to a letter on the word *merde* (since rotting things seldom smell good either) and Pauline Kael used that very same word “rotten” about Mortwell, who was “a piece of ordure.” That's a piece of shit, one of the commonest themes in insults. Remember the Yiddish *schm-* of *fancy-schmancy* and *Joe Schmo*? The Yiddish scholar Leo Rosten called it an “anal symbol.” Yiddish is full of insulting nasal put-downs, from *fancy-schmancy* to *schmuck*, *schnook*, *nebbish*, *narr*, *nayfish*, *noodge*, and *nudnik*. A lot of those have settled right into English because we already have so many insulting nasals of our own.

Preeminent among these is “the notorious *n-word*” *nigger*, but there are many others, typically implying ‘annoying’ or ‘clueless’, such as *nincompoop*, *nitwit*, *numbskull*, *knothead*, *knucklehead*, *nut*, *knave*, *nong*, *nag*, *namby-pamby*, *nancy boy*, *ninny*. (Compare *Newman* on *Seinfeld* and *Niles* on *Frasier*.) When I asked around for others, several people promptly suggested *nerd*, which is only a few decades old. Equally new are *knob*, *nimwit*, and poor *Nimrod*, once a “mighty hunter” in Genesis 10:9, but now just another byword for ‘idiot’. Alliteration drives the point home: “*nattering nabobs of negativism*,” “*neurotic, narcissistic yuppies*,” “*nutrition nannies*,” “*ne'er-do-well Cousin Neddy* and saintly Auntie *Nell*.” A *nervous Nellie* is a ‘worrywart’.

Interestingly, the disdained share their N's with those who do the disdaining—*snobs*, those *snotty* and *snooty* people who *snub* everyone else by “turning up their noses.” That stylized phrase has its roots in an instinctive gesture common to all mammals: jerking the nose away from something smelly, a movement sometimes accompanied by an involuntary little nasal grunt, which becomes a sound of refusal. Paraphrasing Charles de Brosses, Genette writes: “Le nez est l'organe du *non*”—the nose is the *no* organ. The great linguist Jespersen thought so too: “there is good reason for the fact that in so many languages words

of negation begin with *n* (or *m*). Sometimes the *n* is heard without a vowel: it is only the gesture of ‘turning up one’s nose’ made audible.”



Unh-unh! No thanks! *No, nein, nyet!* All our big negatives: *not, nor, never, null, nada, nothing, non-, un-, in-, mal-, mis-*. The American *unh-unh* is an old import from West African languages like Tiv, and it’s getting new punch as kids put an extra *n* in front to say *nunh-unh!* Kids grasp the letter’s negating power very early. How early? Here’s an anecdote from *The New York Times*’ “Metropolitan Diary” (Dec. 9, 2002). A mother wrote in that her five-year-old daughter was asked to bring to school in a paper bag “something starting with the letter ‘N’.” Although the bag was still unfilled by morning, the little girl ate her breakfast unperturbed, firmly refusing her family’s frantic last-minute suggestions of nickels and napkins. “I know what I am going to put in,” she said. “Nothing.” And off she went, bag empty, a budding linguist.



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Progressive Political Talk

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from the Northwest

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), and resumed after a long absence in issue 59 (October 2006). It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Employment

6/30/08—[This is] this evening of my last day at Symantec. I was there ten months, moved down to Portland on the strength of being hired there. Most of my team was laid off; didn't find that out until this afternoon.

Tomorrow I'll return my laptops & submit my severance pay paperwork. I'll apply for unemployment, & move into jobhunting mode, not been there since Dec. '05.

My goal is to have a job in hand before August 1. That's ambitious & hopeful but it's what I'm aimed at.

Tonight keeping it simple: finish or near finish *Cenacle* | 65 | June 2008. Get it done within its dated month. Not far from this.

Really, it's a matter of keeping moving. Send out a fuck lot of résumés.

What work will it be? What day will it happen?

Need my bastards & the Universe helping both—

7/5/08—Jobless leads to a feeling of helpless—yet I'm not—I've already, still fucking bloody with the loss, sent out over two dozen résumés—I can't stop but likewise I *won't* stop—I'll go at this from every angle—

In Holladay Park tonight KD & I asked the Universe for a job comparable to the Symantec one lost, with more loyalty next time—

7/9/08—I have to trust the Universe—& I wonder, Raymond Sr., if I'm supposed to ask you the way you asked your passed mother, I don't know—I need a job comparable to Symantec & a bit more loyal—& I need to do imaginative work for world helping me—in helping in return—

These days are hard even as I demand better of myself—demand I make good on what's possible—since I don't know what that is—

Help me, Universe, & I wish to help in return—

7/15/08—Got a real possibility on the line, but no certainty yet—

Universe, Dad: I feel like what I asked for might be close—like I have a real chance—it's not there yet—still crucial steps to be taken—still the wait for an interview, & the interview, & the result—in the meantime I have to keep hustling keep sending out résumés & make phone calls & begging—the stress of it has gotten the better of me last couple of days—

It's not enough if I get the wish but am hobbled appreciating it or making the most of it—

I need to follow through, to get this position—to score—absolute priority—but a beginning not a conclusion—I have fury that isn't resolvable but I think I can spend—can ally with—can at least live with better—

But for now a job I have not yet won—& this still my entire wish—the rest is pending—I'm recognizing its existence, its need—

My writing will only grow by my efforts, Universe, Dad—job first, job foremost—thank you

7/19/08—Universe, & Dad, I don't know the truth or formula of it, but I believe I am closer, you are helping, I am focused, something & I don't know what . . . I need the job I am asking for—the rest is distraction—today was good in that I was focused for many hours of it, & had good luck—please continue to help me—I am trying to listen when help is offered—& act—please continue to help me get a job comparable to Symantec & a bit more loyal—thank you & I will continue to work hard at this & later other things
t h a n k y o u——

7/18/08—[*Things I've Learned*]

1. Résumé & cover letter should tell a story; frame a narrative of experience & skill
2. No company, or few, especially large ones, are much loyal in bad economic times
3. I'm not much on bar-room networking but word-of-mouth works, well sometimes anyway
4. Not only do I need to keep my résumé updated & circulating, I need to freshen & acquire new skills.
5. Given job uncertainty (2), learning how to invest & save better becomes more important than I'd thought
6. Multiple streams of income is something else to think about, look around for

7/20/08—Universe, Dad, I don't know the extent or the power of our relationship—what possible—my thought is wanting to let it spread in my life—see what that's like—that said, I have to score good work—I need to focus on that for right now—score the job & ready for it how I can. Thank you.

7/25/08—It was a good interview [for technical writer at PacifiCorp], long, seemed like one that would result in a job—I'm not betting blindly—I'm hopeful—4 weeks beginning of next week—perfect time for the month to end in victory—it's a matter of funding—what lost my last job factors prime this one—

And a man I've met & talked to for longer than other—I think he likes me well enough—

Plumage

*Watching the world hustle its many
charms & lies, arguments for answers,
the blunt lure of plumage for flesh,
the driving, wild wish for warmth.*

I believe this job is the best of what I've seen in the time I can work with—it has potential—I can make something good of it if given a shot—pretty much what I'm asking—

Universe, Dad, I ask for this job. Please. Thank you.

7/28/08—It's faith & hope right now—there's no knowing in it—I've been driving toward getting a new job by month's end—not accepting anything else—how much can I control this I don't know—I believe there are invisible forces on my side—the kind may be summoned—

So I'm trying—I'm asking—but the world is unknowable—faith & hope—pages & pages of asking

7/30/08—PacifiCorp fell through, I found out near noon today & fell apart for awhile. By early evening I'd yanked myself up & sent out résumés & queries of all sorts—this one hurts, I was the only one interviewed, the guy liked me & felt I could do the job—his boss decided to get the work done internally—

What I think I need to do tomorrow is gather up all my notes & such for all this month—& push on more coherently—determine myself a schedule for checking jobsites & for emailing or phoning contacts—

This matters like Art. It is equal. It is my daylight task.

Work by day, Art by night. At least M-F

I can do this. Last year was how to get a new job *and* move to Portland. This year's task is more the classic one, but the challenge is the level of job needed. Yet last year's hunt was for like jobs. I need to map out my efforts . . .

Til then, toward then, a war. I am vulnerable & what I cherish too. I haven't been consistently pushing hard enough. There have been a few hours here & there.

But I can do better at this challenge & beyond.

8/11/08—I'm not far from excitement over [going to] Burning Man—more than I think I've been in awhile—yet my job-hunt drags on me—slows & dispirits me some—

I can't give up, I am not giving up, this is action not words, not a vow that lasts or means aught when I am not enacting it—I have been—I am now—*now is all that matters*—

Don't know if I can get that XML editing job at Microsoft—if it will come to an interview, if I will win it, if I can do it—I don't know—other jobs possible too—none telecommuting—so I have preference—yet none is worst—a job in hand will lead to another—I feel like I'm fighting gravity right now—need to cross that line & work on up from there—

I'm not perfect, not even close, won't ever get there, I'm struggling to keep atop this log upon the sea, & when atop to breathe deeply & grok the beauty everywhere, & when under the waves look hard at others below & remember them when I surge up again. Life is not all struggle nor does it have an easy goal or explanation. The days can join & form music or break & seem chaos.

Universe, Dad, I ask again, your help & strength to cross this line. I need paid work, this human life I know right now demands it foremost. Good work, to build more from, & to help others. Help me, & I wish to help others. Thank you.

8/20/08—the best I can say right now is that I haven't stopped—haven't despaired & surrendered—I keep thinking choiceless & stubborn but maybe it's more, more it's faith that I can, I will, I can, I will, I can, I will

There've been times when I had shit, when I was shit—I survived them even as they remain scars—they remain—but I haven't stopped—

Universe, another night I ask you to keep my health good & help me find good work, I ask even as I bear still the best & worst of what I've been, all drives me in new hours, some golden, some dark, help me, please & help me soon, thank you, thank you—

9/3/08—Universe, Dad, I have to win this job, not you or anyone else, but I've been asking all summer for help in the right direction, for a path toward my wish of full-time employment, good as Symantec, but more loyal—I am trying anew this week—at Burning Man, last night there, I called out to you, cried out for your help, & I still do, still am crying to you, it's been a hard summer & my dearest wish is to find success, finally, to feel the victory of my efforts—

I ask your help in my effort tomorrow. Thank you.

9/6/08—Only way I can write now is inside this crisis, its cap of fire on my heart, the brutal of begging, the waste of fucking hours in all this . . .

It's like I think differently but really, no, what it is is that I won't fucking lie in my Art—it will remain my Art, however shitty, & tell what truth I have in a given hour—Right now I feel shitty from this summer's war & hopeful it may soon end—& *I can't forget what this was like*—

I have to keep a bit neither for employment nor for Art—a bit that remembers how fucked over I feel & will try like fuck never again let it happen—

a bit fired with fury—with how men discard other men—& carry on, & sleep with ease—& not call this world a curtained savagery—

9/8/08—The worse crumble than income is my psyche—laid off & jobless hits me deeper than I can long defense against—the increasing humiliation begging for work—I hate fucking recruiters & need to never again, soon & never again be subject to them—

The good news could be not many hours away—as could the bad—

I feel like I have to do more—like what happens [with this new job possibility] has to be catalyst one way or another

Helplessness comes from inactivity—lack of direction, of power; how to come out of it needed & I don't know what or how—

I can't give up yet I feel despair within my walls—

I just don't know—helplessness feeds fear & every hour taints with obsession over the worse prospects—

I don't know how to ask anymore, I've asked & asked & maybe reward for plea is coming—but it's fucking pain—& there's no true relief—better & worse but nothing lasts—

9/10/08—So many thoughts here: what did I learn? Long-term loyalty is rare. Job market sucks. If I get good fortune finally, I need to remember how hard this was.

I need to make sure I'm better defended hereon. Find freelance work to essentially save money. Find ways to invest safely. There's more I'm sure but at least that much. *Remember.* How to do this & invest deeply in new job if it's come? Somehow, if it's come, somehow.

What else. I prayed Universe & my father for a job comparable to Symantec, with more loyalty. Comparable money & benefits, more loyalty. I can't yet say it has happened but on the hopeful cusp.

This morning woke seeming with a message from my Dad:

Be brave. Have hope.

I don't know, but the message is clear. Maybe it's from him.

I kept at this praying these eleven weeks. Maybe this period has concluded. I'll be finding out in about 12 hours, maybe longer. But wait til then

I'm sitting here obsessing this as all summer—whether or not this helps.

9/14/08—Tomorrow I start at [new job]—the more I hear about the bad economy, the more I am grateful to have a job again.

Until I show up, & start, I can only sit here unknowing—that's pretty much it—12 hours from now I'll know much more. Tonight is mystery—

Thank you, Universe & Dad for how you helped.

9/25/08—Call this an epilogue to my Summer 2008 job-hunting notes. Something coalesced for me today. I woke this morning from a dream about finding a job, & then having it pulled back. That happened this summer. More than once, in fact. It was a disturbing dream, too real feeling not to leave a wound.

Then a call came on my cell phone as I was leaving for my waking life's job; it was for a contract job, a recruiter told me, reading a two-sentence summary of it. He asked me about pay range—after I asked him. Like a weird mind fuck, I was being told to guess the rate, even challenged as to whether I knew my own salary history. A month ago, jobless, I would have dealt with this bullshit, & a thank-ye to boot. As it was, I pushed back, & he hung up on me.

I biked to work furious, how I'd dealt with such shit all summer—waiting for phone calls, for emails, for *anything*. A beggar in a game with no fair rules & indifference, indifferent hostility, toward some of its players.

I've escaped it for now, but do not feel completely safe. Employment these days is a gamble, not a comfort. There are people, factors, forces stacked up against the stability most people seek, the “decent wage for a day's work” idea once thought of as standard practice among reputable companies.

Now it seems more like the idea is to make a person nervous, easier to intimidate, the goal being to produce a more timid, compliant workforce. Crush the power of unions. Push people into leaning on their credit cards. Create a workforce of grateful wage slaves. A rare few will make an awful lot of money; most will struggle, live with struggle & worry so commonly that they will not suspect that something has gone wrong, that they need not live like this, that someone is *manipulating the situation*. Big business is lying, those in government are lying. Not every last soul but enough to systematize the lies. Create a “normality” of stress & uncertainty.

There are those who like it like this, who will strive to keep things uncertain, who will profit *madly* from instability. Most people will never see them, up there, would-be man-gods orchestrating the unending series of crises, laughing lords of the lie. I'm just asking myself who is benefitting from all this chaos—financial panic—who stands to gain & who to lose—suddenly in a week the economy is crashing? It makes no sense—or maybe it does—

I'm sitting here looking online for answers & there are none—all I can think is: greed, fear

Will anything change? With Obama?

I believe so—



Politics

I believe Obama is sincere, my worry is more him getting elected, not getting assassinated, and being able to carry out his promises. There are lots of vested interests in this country that don't mind that millions of people are suffering. They are making sick amounts of cash and that is just fine, thank you.

So Obama will come in trying to move big filthy mountains. JFK and RFK and Dr. King were leaders for reform and change, all killed for their efforts. Carter tried long ago, and got crushed in four years. Clinton tried and they took him down too. I think it is possible Obama may do better, but nobody can know for sure what is going to happen tomorrow, much less on Election Day or in 2009.

I maintain hope because I can't see despair as an option at this point. If McCain wins . . . I can't put easily into words how that will feel for me or anyone else. Like this 8 year nightmare is not going to end after all. Like we woke up and it is still here.

All I can tell you is this: volunteer to get out the vote, and new voters registered. Man phone banks, or go to Obama's website (<http://www.barackobama.com>) to learn how to phone canvass from your own home. If in Florida, with its large numbers of retired Jewish people, you have to help get out the word that Palin is a Jews-For-Jesus anti-semitic lunatic. Do what you can, and encourage all those who care about this election to vote. Don't despair, that leads to inaction, to just giving up. This election is worth the efforts of everyone. As Obama said at the Democratic National Convention in Denver:

EIGHT YEARS IS ENOUGH!!!

We're in bad shape, in every way imaginable. Obama is promising no magic solution, but he and Biden are smart enough and care enough to arrive next January in DC and get to work on what needs to be done. It will be slow, and it won't be pretty, but I believe they will be at it every single day. It's not about party politics, it's about people's lives, especially those of the poor, the sick, the elderly, the handicapped. Everyone is needed to lend a hand, and to benefit in the long run.

I'm on board, with my doubts and my cynicisms. And my hopes. There's no choice. We either start turning this situation around or keep going under.

We are living in a country that is supposed to be a nation of laws, not men, governed by the Constitution, an amazing document that the bastards among us would love to destroy, and are trying to every day. Now, we either stand up for what we have, what is ours,

or we let the motherfuckers take it. We bend over, take it dry up the ass, and pay for the chance at another go-round.

I believe that in the world of men and women anything is possible, from the beautiful to the grotesque, and that there are no agreed upon rules for conduct at all places in all times. It's all subject to who's in charge, who has the most gold, the most guns. I don't think humanity has really progressed much in the centuries. Read Plato, read Chaucer, read Dostoevsky. Someone is always trying to help; someone else is trying to steal it all.

Can things get fundamentally better? Maybe, but I don't believe this will happen through politics. Politics is just the process of deciding who gets rich and who gets thrown in jail. Who gets to fuck who. Whether or not a person born a certain gender or skin color or ethnicity is by law "better" than another. It's not going to take us into hyperspace, or bring us happiness.

I don't believe in politics as one might believe in a deity. I see it as necessary because of the lousy way we treat each other. At best, it compels us to not do so badly toward one another. Last 8 years, it's been pushing our worst sides to the fore. I believe we can do better, that Obama will help us point in that direction again. It's hope, but of a specific, and limited kind.

Nobody knows what is going to happen next. I am choosing to believe that the way things are is not the way things need to stay. Things change, and we can have an effect, or not.

Some will choose to opt out, not vote, some millions. And call the system bunk, or lazily call for coups or revolutions or third parties that never quite materialize.

I believe choosing to vote, especially for a candidate like Barack Obama, is better than doing nothing. For me, it is a positive act of faith in something. As I've said, I share some of the same doubts and despair many have expressed, but I'm choosing to have hope, to be brave.

Psychedelics

My work with psychedelics has emphasized to me how we are conditioned by society to divide humankind up into groups, teams if you will, who compete against each other. Whether more obvious groups like nation-states, or less obvious, like those who prefer wine and cheese “versus” those who want a 12-pack and a good football game “versus” those who want to pass the pipe, dance to the drums, and drink the kykeon til dawn and past. We are brainwashed into us “versus” them. Seems to me like this way of being works out for some and not for others (for example, Wall Street crashes and some get big government no-interest loans while others, regular folks, continue to watch their houses foreclosed, their jobs lost).

Us “versus” them starts with the truly powerful who found ways to make psychedelics illegal, and push us into a cigarette smoking, booze swilling bloodlust loving society. Us “versus” them works, is fantastically successful, when we fight amongst ourselves and hardly ever look up to see the laughing would-be man-gods above us.

If you want to see the perniciously smiling face of the real enemy, watch George Bush on the TV babbling about financial houses of cards falling and experts learnin’ him in the ways of economic disaster. Or consider the “duty” a police officer swears to uphold when he catches some homeless street kid toking a blunt in an alley, cuffs him, drives him away to a locked cell.

I believe that psychedelics can be the great equalizers, which render the “great” and the “humble” among us on the same plane. I get that feeling some nights at the Burning Man festival, when I know that rich folk and more regular folk are all around me, and walk equally, no limousines for the rich and famous. I used to get that feeling at Phish shows where the band would play its music to the moment, to the feeling of the night and the audience, when it seemed like it was all of us making the music even as only four were on stage playing the instruments.

Psychedelic reality belongs to anyone who cares to, and is given opportunity to, venture into it. It will humble and teach and heal anyone who brings to it this wish, and a willingness to learn, to open up to the strange and terrifying spaces it contains. There is no hierarchy in psychedelic space, no roped off areas for the perty people. None. That’s why I like it. It makes me think of being in a great forest, or listening to great music, in the sense that there is room enough for all to experience, to dance, to learn, or to un-learn if need be.

As for Leary, Huxley, and so on, the battles they fought matter in so far as they helped to bring more of us into psychedelic reality, helped more of us realized that we could “dream awake” (which is how I often think of tripping), that we could get down into the machinery of our souls (the re-programming John Lilly talked about) and do some clean up, some tinkering. I’m grateful to them as social pioneers and many of them, and others like McKenna and Pinchbeck, are gifted writers whose thoughts I value. But I do not feel like when I am farther into psychedelic reality than the daily grind (which is to say, I do not believe that I am ever outside of this reality, even baseline sober), that I am doing any less

than they did. That my experience, or anyone else's, is lesser, or for that matter greater, than theirs was.

What was true in 1969 when the Jefferson Airplane wrote it is still true now: "We are outlaws in the eyes of America." No doubts. And the fact that this nation has turned its jails into a multi-million dollar industry, housing pot smokers in the countless numbers, is a crime against us all. The fact is that (as the Doors sang in 1968, old truisms still seeming true) "they've got the guns and we've got the numbers," which means they for now have a tactical advantage on us.

They. Us. Wasn't that what I railed against previously? It was. To bring this on home, or try, I will come back to McCain/Bush and say, paraphrasing the next line in that Doors song, *we need to take over*—and if that starts with dosing someone with E in a nice private analyst's office, so be it. We'll get Obama into office too, and I am sure his approach to the so-called "Drug War" will prove different over time, just the waste of money and human life will I'm sure outrage him.

So much seems to ride on 11/4/08.







Peter Bebergal

Will Harvard Drop Acid Again?

Published June 9, 2008 by the *Boston Phoenix*

<http://thePhoenix.com/Boston/News/62230-Will-Harvard-drop-acid-again/>

In a moment of delightful whimsy in the annals of drug history, Albert Hofmann, after purposely ingesting LSD for the first time, rode his bicycle home and experienced all manner of beatific and hellish visions. Hofmann, a chemist with Sandoz Laboratories in Switzerland, had recently synthesized the compound lysergic acid diethylamide (a.k.a. LSD, or “acid”) from ergot fungus. A few days earlier, on April 16, 1943, Hofmann had accidentally absorbed LSD through his fingertips and began experiencing “an uninterrupted stream of fantastic pictures, extraordinary shapes with intense, kaleidoscopic play of colors.” Curious about the rabbit hole into which he had tripped, Hofmann dissolved some of the compound into water and deliberately swallowed a dose before taking his bicycle journey home—and elsewhere.

This experience set the stage for what was to become one of the most profound cultural forces in America, the use—and abuse—of psychedelic drugs. LSD, as well as other hallucinogens, would go on to help shape our ideas of consciousness, religion, and law for decades to come. From Timothy Leary’s proclamation to “Tune in, turn on, drop out,” to the spiritual underpinnings of the New Age movement, psychedelics would prove to be a restless burden for both the drugs’ users and the government that tried to suppress their use.

Hofmann, who died this past April at the age of 102, watched it all play out, horrified by the behavior of both drug users and opponents. He winced as the hippies took LSD with wild abandon, and wrung his hands as the government, here and abroad, criminalized LSD and other psychedelic compounds. But Hofmann also lived long enough to see it all come full circle. By the time he died, legitimate above-ground psychedelic research was alive and well at places like Johns Hopkins and, even more telling, at Harvard University, the latter under the guidance of Dr. John Halpern. Sitting a little to the left and outside of Halpern is Rick Doblin, founder of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), a nonprofit research group that, through the support of members and donors, helps fund scientists to do bona fide work with psychedelics in the hopes of legitimizing their therapeutic use. Together, the two men form a kind of psychedelic odd couple: Halpern is young but traditional and cautious, a scientist first and foremost. Doblin is a veteran in this world, a little rougher around the edges, and speaks openly about his own psychedelic adventures and his vision for less drug prohibition.

Nearly 50 years ago, Leary and his colleague Richard Alpert created the Harvard Psilocybin Project, only to be fired by the university a few years later under scandalous circumstances. Harvard had not taken up this kind of drug research since that time. But after years of fundraising and petitioning for Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval, this

past February, under the auspices of Harvard, Halpern began administering MDMA (better known to the Glo-Stick crowd as Ecstasy) to dying cancer patients, to see how they psychologically benefit from the drug. And now Halpern is also hoping to get approval from Harvard for a project that will evaluate the effects of LSD and psilocybin (the psychedelic compound found in hallucinogenic mushrooms) on patients suffering from the debilitating condition known as cluster headaches.

I meet Dr. Halpern—considered the most important above-ground scientist in America willing to investigate hallucinogenic drugs—at McLean Hospital, a teaching hospital for Harvard Medical School, where he is assistant professor of psychiatry. Halpern, 39, has been at McLean since 1998 and made a name for himself in 2005 with a groundbreaking research project studying peyote use within the Native American Church. Prior to that, Halpern worked on projects related to drug addiction, and the use of hallucinogens to treat it.

Before we head into his office at McLean, Halpern wants to take a walk in the woods that surround the hospital's Belmont grounds. It is a crisp spring morning, and I half expect Halpern to pick and ingest some lichen, or start scraping some bark off a tree that he would brew into a psychedelic tea. Eventually we find our way to his office, where I imagined would be cushions on the floor, or maybe a giant statue of Shiva or Vishnu. What I see instead is the office of a typical Harvard professor: wall-to-ceiling papers, books, and journals. And while the screen-saver on his computer monitor is decidedly psychedelic, there is nothing here to suggest I am in the den of a mad Harvard scientist, hell-bent on dosing the collective American consciousness with LSD. In fact, when I mention the ghost of Leary and his legacy, Halpern smiles and says, "Well, we have seen how not to do it, haven't we?"

Leary of Leary

In 1959, Leary had just begun a lecturer position in psychology at Harvard. After an acquaintance told him about the religious history of psychedelic mushrooms, Leary decided to try it for himself. He wrote later that it completely transformed his understanding of consciousness, and sent him on a path from which, except for a few stints in prison, he would never stray. Along with his colleague at Harvard, and fellow psychology professor Alpert (today known as Baba Ram Dass), Leary was able to begin a legitimate study of psilocybin and other drugs, sanctioned by the university with the promise by Leary and Alpert that they would keep it aboveboard.

Eventually it was discovered by university officials that Leary and Alpert were indeed giving LSD and psilocybin to undergraduates, as well as to other professors. By then the rumor mill was at full tilt; 1963 saw an explosion of talk on campus about all-night drug parties at Leary's house.

A few days before Leary and Alpert were officially expelled in May of 1963, the *New York Times* reported that the decision to oust the duo had already come down from the college president, Nathan Pusey. The paper described a growing fear among officials at Harvard and other colleges of students holding "private psilocybin parties."

Leary and Alpert acquired a huge and shambling mansion in Milbrook, New York, where they continued their experiments. They were regularly visited by artists, musicians,

and freaks of every kind. LSD became illegal in 1966 (psilocybin in 1971) and many of the original researchers, including Hofmann, were unhappy with where Leary had taken the public's understanding of the drug. Leary, they complained, took them out of the purview of science and put them into the hands of, well, dirty hippies everywhere.

But the criminalization of such hallucinogens as LSD and mushrooms didn't just affect the Haight-Ashbury crowd. Eventually, authorities targeted other hallucinogens and made them illegal as well. Mescaline, the psychedelic compound found in the peyote cactus, was also listed as a Schedule 1 drug (meaning it was understood to have no accepted medical use, a high potential for dependence or harm, and no parameters for safe administration). Nevertheless, Native Americans had long used this plant as an important part of their religious rituals. Halpern, who spent years working with Native Americans for his research, witnessed firsthand how dear peyote is to them and their culture. "This is their heart," says Halpern. "The leaders say, 'You have taken our land, tried to take our way of life, our language, now all we have left is this peyote.'" Eventually, in 1996, under very strict regulations, members of the Native American Church (NAC) were given permission to use peyote in their ceremonies, but this did little to change the national anxiety over psychedelic drugs.

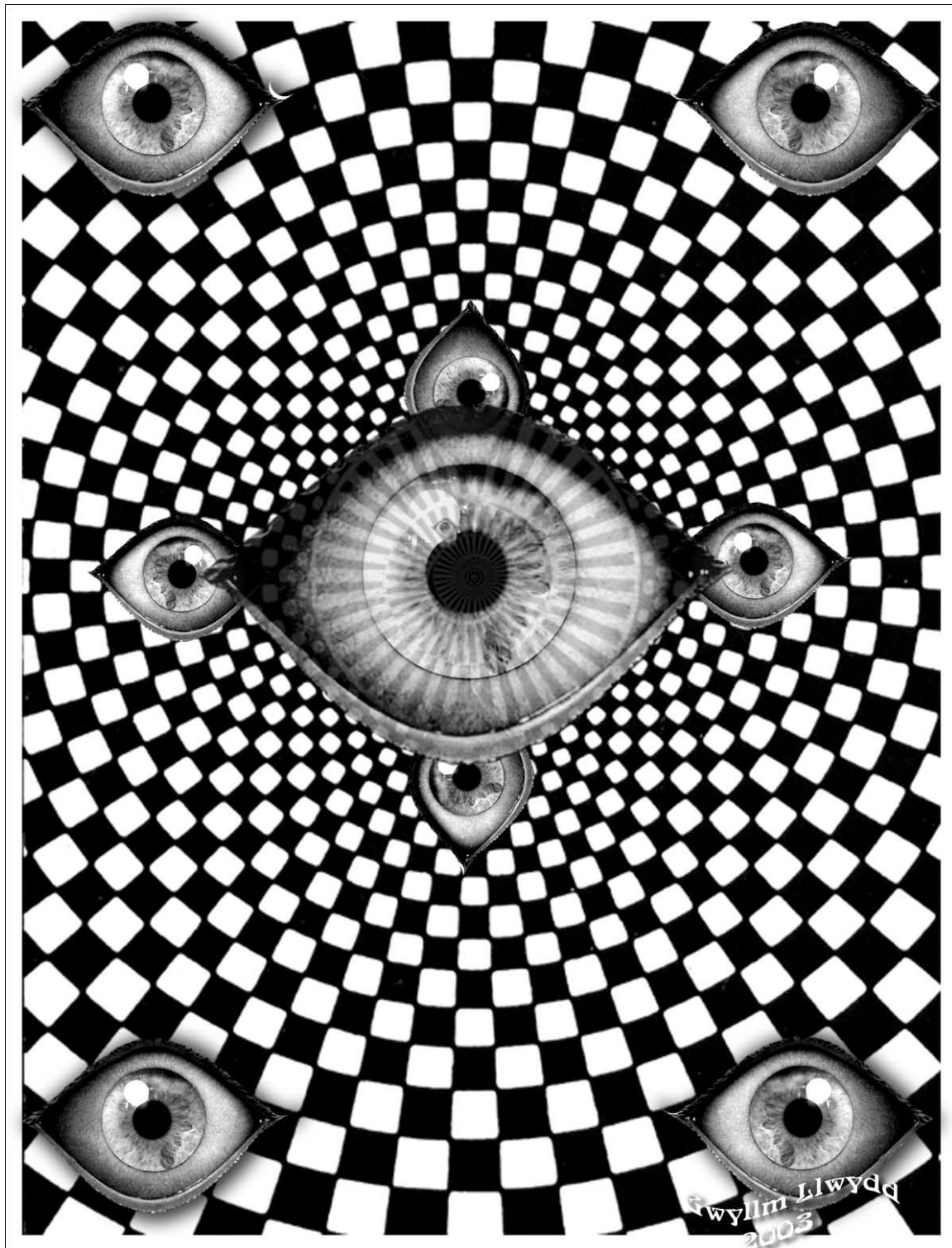
Halpern's research revealed that members of the NAC suffer no ill effects from the ingestion of peyote, and in fact have lower rates of alcoholism and drug addiction than the general population. I was curious whether Halpern participated in any of the ceremonies and, if so, if he had lost any objectivity as a scientist. "I had been invited by the leadership of NAC to 'pray with them,' which means to take peyote," says Halpern. "I would not be able to do the work if I had not." As a scientist, his job was to report harms if he found them. But he didn't find any.

"It's about legitimate science"

When it comes to drug research, even professionals tend to be skeptical. Halpern says that some of his peers accused him of not doing legitimate work, but he defends it by noting that he wasn't doing it alone in a bong-filled vacuum: "What about all my collaborators? What about the senior professors who are supervising my work, or the biostatisticians who evaluate the entire data set, or the research assistants independent of me, who are entering in the data? Are all those people biased too? It almost takes on a level of paranoia that something wrong is happening."

So how did researching peyote lead Halpern to study MDMA and LSD, which have no accepted sacramental use? Halpern explains that the question of their status as psychedelic drugs with a controversial history is secondary to the possibility that they have real medical use, and immediately points to the example of Thalidomide, which caused terrible birth defects in children born in the late '50s/early '60s. Nevertheless, he notes, the drug did prove to have tremendous usefulness for alleviating pain in certain forms of cancer and very painful skin inflammation and, under very controlled situations, is still prescribed.

"When Schedule 1 drugs are shown that they are effective, they become Schedule 2," says Halpern. "And if they are abused, they can be prosecuted as Schedule 1. Some [similar] arrangement could be made for some of these [hallucinogenic] compounds, as well."



It's true Halpern is giving MDMA to dying cancer patients who are suffering from related anxiety, but he explains that these are not take-home medicines. The same would be true of LSD if his study of that drug is approved, which he hopes will happen sometime this year. First he must deliver protocols to McLean's Institutional Review Board. If these are accepted, he can go to the FDA to get its approval to use LSD in a clinical trial.

The idea for the LSD study came from an unexpected place. Because of his reputation as one of the few above-ground researchers dealing with hallucinogens, Halpern was contacted by a young man who suffered from cluster headaches, who also found a great deal of long-term relief when he used psilocybin and LSD.

According to Halpern, cluster headaches are one of the most painful conditions known in medicine—a gruesome illness. Sufferers have described it as an ice pick slowly and insidiously boring through one's eye and into one's skull. The afflicted have been known to bang their heads against a wall and pull their hair out. "People anthropomorphize it," says Halpern. "They call it the devil."

Through Internet research, Halpern found a large community of cluster-headache sufferers who had learned, on their own, that hallucinogens could interrupt their attacks. The individuals, mostly members of cluster-headache support groups, had independently discovered that they all used LSD and psilocybin to self-medicate.

They had tried to get the attention and backing of neurologists, in an effort to lend credibility to their claims. But, because of what Halpern called the rigmarole of doing research with these drugs—given all the federal hoops through which one has to jump—their efforts and pleas were ignored. They eventually found Halpern, and he and a number of other researchers managed to interview 53 cluster-headache sufferers who had taken hallucinogens. In a paper published in 2006 in the journal *Neurology*, Halpern noted that no other medication was known to stop cluster headaches. And yet a little acid or some magic mushrooms seemed to do the trick.

Now their hope is to get approval from the FDA, and for McLean Hospital to actually administer LSD to cluster-headache sufferers. One of the principal researchers in the preliminary cluster-headache project, Dr. Andrew Sewell, thinks that this study is unlike any other.

"You can find 50 people on the Internet who will claim anything," says Sewell, "but to get a control group like this showed that a clinical trial is viable."

I suggest to Halpern that, for a researcher looking to conduct LSD experiments, it is mighty serendipitous that the cluster-headache group would come along. There is a paisley-speckled chicken-and-egg question: is Halpern trying to do research with hallucinogens or is he trying to help people with cluster headaches? "It's about legitimate science," he says. "Patients that are enrolled in a research study deserve no less, and it's the only way we can get to the bottom of some of the questions that still remain about these drugs." But does he hope a study like this will change thinking about how LSD could have benefits beyond its controlled medicinal value? "I am interested in this research," he says, "if it further legitimates them as medicines. If they are not, then [they are] out of my field." From an outsider's perspective, he admits, research with these drugs may sound controversial. But, he insists, these questions and his research are scientifically sound.

"Harvard and McLean have very high standards and I have fierce loyalty to them,"

explains Halpern, obviously couching his words carefully. “If I am going to ask the institution to do something that is potentially stressful in the public eye, it better darn well be for the right reasons.”

Dr. James Fadiman, for one, thinks the cluster-headache work is a novel piece of research. “But this kind of work doesn’t say much about psychedelics,” says Fadiman, who is a psychologist with long ties to the psychedelic community (including experiments with Leary) and who is co-founder of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California, which trains clinicians to focus on states of higher consciousness and the spiritual dimensions of human experience. What Fadiman wants to know is not how well LSD works on headaches, but the mechanism that makes it work. “For example,” he asks, “do the headache sufferers experience an out-of-body awareness?” The medical community accepted acupuncture only when it was proven that it heightened endorphins. Without some existing model to measure it by, the medical community won’t accept LSD as medicine, no matter the patients’ claims that their headaches have stopped.

The three-headed beast

Imagine you are standing before the gate of Hades, which is guarded by the three-headed dog Cerberus. But instead of ripping you to shreds, he offers you some choice acid and a detailed map of the underworld. The world of psychedelic drug use is not unlike this friendly, electric-Kool-Aid-doling version of the ultimate hellhound. The first head is that of the drug-adoring hippies who grow their own mushrooms and continue to nurture conspiracy theories about the drugs while they search for a mystical experience from them. The second belongs to the scientists: people like Halpern; Roland Griffiths, who led a study in psilocybin and mysticism at Johns Hopkins; and Rick Strassman, whose 1990 then-radical research into DMT—the powerful drug found in the psychedelic drink ayahuasca favored by South American shamans—opened the door for legitimate psychedelic research, research done under very controlled and rigorous conditions. And the third head is a weird conglomeration of the other two, typical of such folks as Daniel Pinchbeck, who lauds the spiritual benefits of DMT and uses a kind of pseudo-science to, er, chart the date of the apocalypse, all the while having serious and sober proclamations to issue about the environment and technology. But many times—particularly when tripping on some fine blotter acid—these heads merge into a single face.

At the World Psychedelic Forum in Basel, Switzerland, this past March, those in attendance included Pinchbeck, the psychedelic artist Alex Grey, and a number of ethnobotanists, shamans, psychics, psychiatrists, and chemists—including Hofmann—to name a few. That all these individuals could unite under the umbrella of their interest in psychedelic drugs points to an underlying shared concern: is there a future for psychedelics outside of Phish concerts? And can this be achieved when, alongside those doing serious research, there are those who believe themselves to be reincarnations of Quetzalcoatl?

Doblin thinks he has the solution. I meet with the founder and president of MAPS at his house in a quiet neighborhood in Belmont. Again, as was the case with Halpern, there is little to suggest that this is the home of a leading anti-prohibitionist and one of the most important figures in the story of psychedelic drug research. The house shows more signs of

kids and dogs and a happy family life than Doblin's work. I wonder if the neighbors know the guy next door mowing his lawn has probably taken more trips than a host of Logan-centric frequent flyers.

Doblin's psychedelic story began in 1971, when he was 18 and wanted to become a psychedelic psychotherapist in the tradition of Stanislav Grof, who was the first to work with LSD as a therapeutic agent. But, to Doblin, there was a problem: "I was waking up as everything was being shut down." So he dropped out of college and worked as a carpenter—and at becoming a seasoned LSD traveler. Ten years later he went back to school, recognizing that, if he was going to do anything involving psychedelic drugs that would be taken seriously, it would have to be above ground.

In 1984, Doblin's work in psychedelic research was suddenly given a purpose. While use of MDMA was legal (it had not yet made its impact in the underground), the federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) suggested it was going to start the process of criminalization. Doblin gathered together a group of above-ground researchers under the name the Earth Metabolic Design Lab (EMDL) and they decided to sue the DEA. The board of advisers included practically everybody in the field of psychedelic research at the time, including Dr. Andrew Weil and Laura Huxley (widow of the late Aldous).

By 1985, Doblin and his colleagues were making in-roads. Until, that is, Doblin was a guest on *The Phil Donahue Show*. As the spokesperson for the EMDL, he explained that MDMA should be a Schedule 3 drug: only illegal without a prescription. Donahue asked him what he thought about other uses. "I said I thought prohibition was a disaster and 'recreational use' is a pejorative term," recalls Doblin. "It caused a big problem, and I was labeled the Tim Leary of the '80s." Some of the people in Doblin's group were government funded and many threatened to resign from the EMDL if he kept speaking out publicly against drug prohibition. "So I decided I would resign," says Doblin.

Without Doblin's leadership, the group dissipated. By 1986, Doblin was even more convinced that his work needed to move from the counterculture to the mainstream, and so he founded MAPS. MAPS has helped support a number of projects, including FDA-approved marijuana studies and an LSD study in Switzerland. But Doblin still wanted to pursue his teenage dream of becoming a psychedelic therapist—helping people to move through trauma and other neuroses with the guided use of hallucinogens. If he is anything like Leary, he's Leary sans egotism and self-importance.

Doblin applied to a number of Ph.D. programs, but no one wanted to support a grad student who was looking to use psychedelics in psychotherapy. In what Doblin describes as a stoned insight, he realized that, since politics kept getting in the way of the work he wanted to do, maybe he should study the politics. His application to Harvard's Kennedy School of Government was accepted, and in 2001 he received his Ph.D. But despite his Harvard affiliation, Doblin's reputation and MAPS's ties to the underground often remain a heavy burden.

In 2002, Doblin wanted to do an MDMA study with Halpern, but he needed to demonstrate to McLean that MAPS is not a cheerleader for the drug and is genuinely interested in risks as well as benefits.

"The methodological rigor of MAPS's research should all overwhelm the fact that I happen to believe that prohibition is a bad idea," says Doblin.

Early MDMA tests focused on neurocognitive effects that deal with behavior and memory related to brain function. But Doblin believes these studies were flawed because most users of MDMA do other drugs, making it impossible to know if any cognitive deficits were a result of MDMA use alone. And as serendipitous as the cluster-headache email was for Halpern, Doblin received information from a MAPS member about a group of people who have done MDMA exclusively, with almost no history of prior drug or alcohol use: young fallen Mormons in Utah.

Doblin went to Halpern and Halpern's boss, Harrison "Skip" Pope, and proclaimed his objectivity. He says, "I told them, 'I'm fine with risk. I don't have to be defensive about this drug. Let's do the best study we can do.'" MAPS gave McLean \$15,000 for a pilot study with the Mormons. Eventually, the National Institute on Drug Abuse gave McLean \$1.8 Million for further MDMA research. The next project that Doblin and Halpern wanted to launch was the MDMA cancer study.

MAPS was getting money for Halpern's salary and other preliminary steps to get the psychedelic research off the ground, and then finally got permission from the FDA in 2004. In January 2006, however, McLean installed a new president, Dr. Jack Gorman, who had worked in the federal drug czar's office. Gorman looked at what McLean was about to sign off on—the first psychedelic study at Harvard since 1966—and stopped the project in its tracks.

"I knew this was important research," Doblin tells me. "People are dying in pain and fear." But there was no way Gorman was going to green light a study involving Doblin, a known drug user and an anti-prohibitionist with a penchant for suing the government.

"So MAPS withdrew," explains Doblin, and instructed one of its major funders to donate directly to McLean.

Still, Doblin didn't go that quietly. He was able to get permission to cross-reference whatever data comes out of the study, which he hopes to use for MAPS's own mission to get MDMA (and hopefully other psychedelics) made legal for therapeutic purposes. (Gorman resigned his post in May 2006.)

Brave new world

Long before Leary, a number of prominent thinkers and scientists were dropping acid, eating mushrooms, and changing some long-held notions about mind and consciousness. Ironically, the first instance of psychedelic research in America also began at Harvard, this one in the late 19th century. Philosopher and psychologist William James, in an attempt to understand mystical states of consciousness, experimented with nitrous oxide, which he believed "simulates the mystical consciousness in an extraordinary degree." In 1882 and 1889, James published a number of articles, both anonymously (in *The Atlantic Monthly*) and under his own name.

But psychedelics weren't going to embed themselves into the psychic landscape on their own. The first real American psychedelic milestone occurred in 1953, when Aldous Huxley was given mescaline by Humphrey Osmond, a scientist with an interest in LSD and consciousness. Huxley wrote about his experience in the now classic work *The Doors of Perception*, which he titled after a quote from the visionary poet William Blake. Few could

have foreseen that this slight little tome about an intellectual's illumination and personal psychedelic journey would have shot such a powerful solar flare out into the cultural atmosphere.

Not long after Huxley's publication, other scholars and writers started taking psilocybin, writing papers, and performing many other experiments. The late '50s and early '60s saw an explosion of above-ground psychedelic research. For the most part, even those affiliated with such places as Harvard were not afraid to discuss their own experiences with these drugs.

Leary's Harvard stint and the criminalization of psychedelics profoundly affected serious researchers' and others' ability to talk candidly. Nevertheless, this candor helped get funding for research at places like Harvard. Halpern is intensely private, which in his case helps both the science and the institutions.

On the other hand, Doblin's work has been shaped by his experiences, and while MAPS as an organization wants the same thing Halpern does, which is to assess the medicinal value of these drugs, Doblin's own vision is further reaching. He envisions a day when there are psychedelic clinics and, after someone participates in a workshop, or better yet, passes a "test" that demonstrates they can safely drive these drugs around the highways and side streets of their consciousness, as Doblin says, "They can get a license that will allow them to use psychedelics privately."

More than 40 years ago, some psychedelic investigators imagined LSD playgrounds, Disneyworlds of drugs where people could drop acid and frolic in a land of cellophane flowers and newspaper taxis. Doblin's vision is more realistic, but the idea that psychedelics could one day become a regular part of our culture is not so different. Neither Halpern nor Doblin wants to try to levitate the Pentagon, but I imagine that, of the two of them, Doblin wouldn't mind trying.

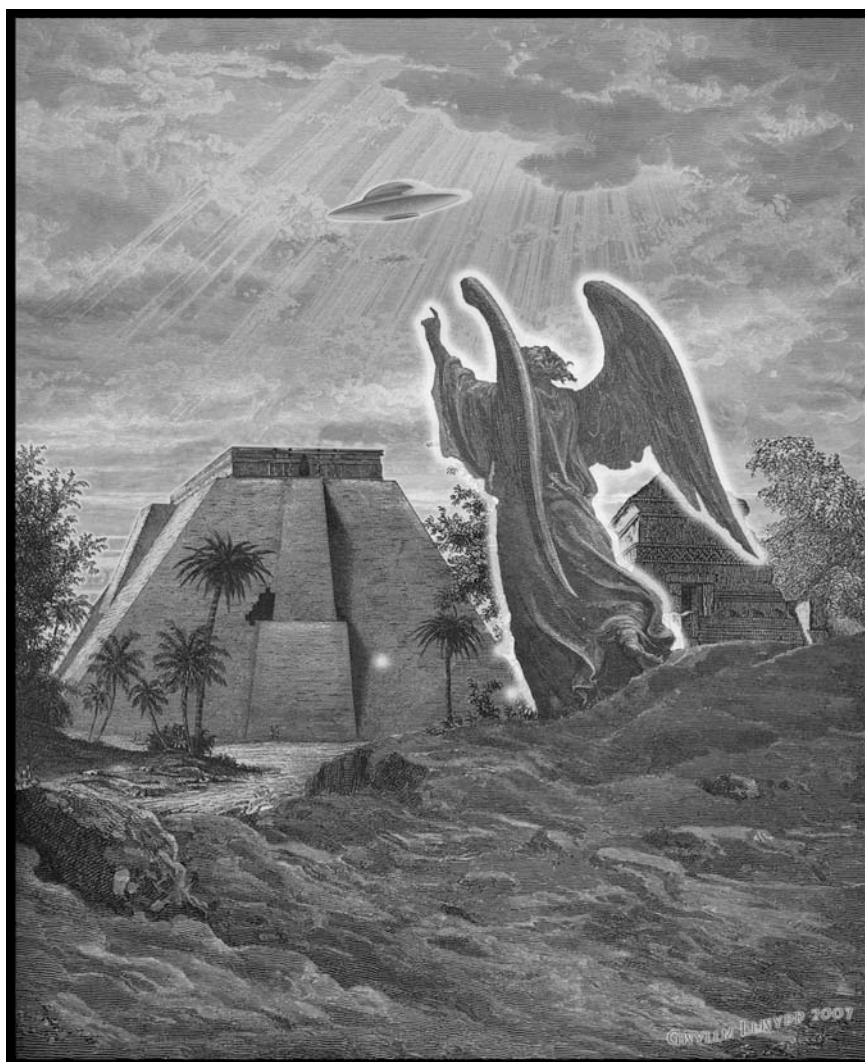
Halpern seems content to work in his lab, although beyond his field work with Native Americans in his peyote study, he has spent time on the firing line. Between 2002 and 2005, Halpern was a ranger at Burning Man for something called Sanctuary, a kind of official safe house that provided psychotherapy and support for people who were having a rough time with a drug trip.

For Doblin and MAPS's mission, Halpern's work is central to their hope that MDMA, LSD, and other hallucinogens will be legally administrable. He would also like to see the public's fear of these drugs dissipate as we come to understand them as real medicines. And for Doblin, there is nothing better than having this happen at Harvard. "Harvard is where Timothy Leary blew it," he says. "Bringing this research back to Harvard is a symbol of cultural healing."

Halpern, meanwhile, wants to continue researching the legitimacy of these drugs, despite what people think about the company he might have to keep. "We'll continue to have friends from all kinds of places," he admits, "and sometimes people will even identify themselves as opponents." It's possible those opponents might even come from the underground. Making psychedelic drugs legitimate could put the regulation of them into the hands of people who don't understand what many believe is the drugs' spiritual value. Sometimes all you need is a trip to the woods and a handful of mushrooms, not a million-dollar research study. "Freedom of religion should include the right to explore one's own

consciousness,” says Fadiman, “and these drugs should be made available with full information and training.”

Hofmann’s famous book on the subject is *LSD, My Problem Child*, and he hoped it would be accepted as his wonder child. But there is a perception that anyone trying to work with these substances is, by default, in the radical—some would say irresponsible—tradition of Leary, not the sober, scientific one of Hofmann. “There are no hidden agendas,” says Halpern about his own work. “But medicine is about taking risks—and sometimes looking in unusual places.”



Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His writing last appeared in *Cenacle* | 65 | June 2008. I read his new poems for every issue he contributes to and, from 3000 miles away, I am still able to share news of his soul within these pages. One of life's surer pleasures.

Peter Bebergal lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is the author, with Scott Korb, of *The Faith Between Us*. Describes himself on his website (<http://www.bebergal.com>) as a "writer, husband, father, comic book collector, robot builder, sober psychedelic investigator, failed mystic, dealer of rare fossils."

Rachel Carson was born in 1907 in Springdale, Pennsylvania. She was an American marine biologist and nature writer whose 1962 book *Silent Spring*, about DDT and other dangerous pesticides, led to a nationwide ban on use of these chemicals, and spawned a nationwide environmental awakening.

G.C. Dillon lives in Plainville, Connecticut. His writing last appeared in *Cenacle* | 65 | June 2008. There is in his work a humor I can only think sources, in part, from his Irish blood. Smart, smartass, ribald, & sad, one & all of these. A little Joyce, a little Bono, a pint or two . . .

Ralph H. Emerson lives in South Glastonbury, Connecticut. His writing last appeared in *Cenacle* | 65 | June 2008. We are now in the process of developing his book of essays about phonesthemes, tentatively scheduled to be published by Scriptor Press in 2009. Tis a pleasure to be working with him again, hearing his voice on the phone.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her writing last appeared in *Cenacle* | 65 | June 2008. One fine day, some years from now, I would like to be sitting with Jude at my favorite table at Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, relaxed a little while from our lovely grinding lives, watching the chess players, the tourists, the street musicians. Talkin' books 'n' art . . .

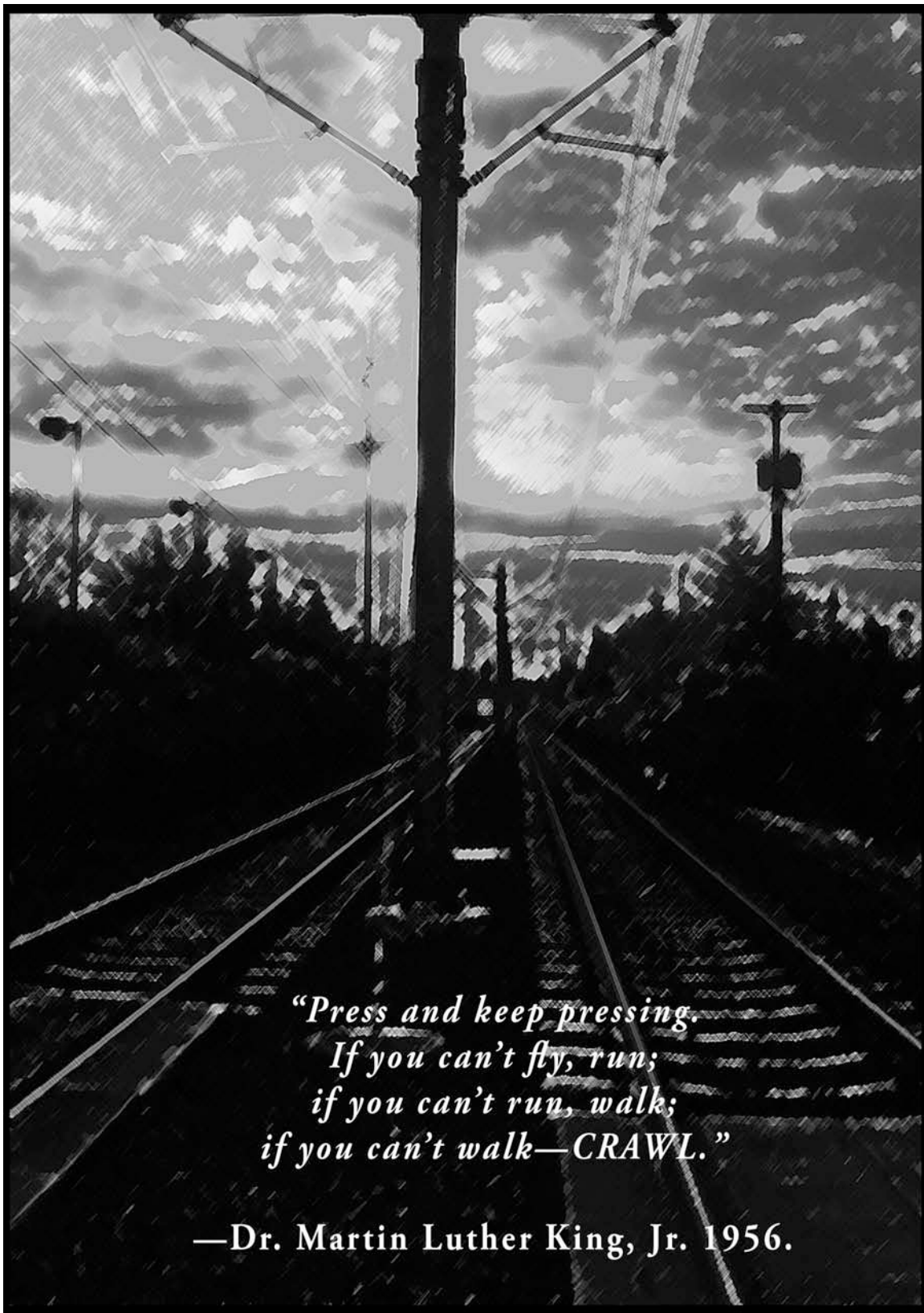
Gwyllm Llwydd lives in Portland, Oregon. His art is new to these pages, and very welcomed. His excellent online community, Earth Rites (<http://earthrites.org>), features such projects as a literary magazine, radio station, and mailing list. A dear and dedicated man to the ways of Art and consciousness.

Daniel Schroyer lives in Colfax, California. His poetry is new to these pages, and also very welcomed. Mari Floraday, whom KD and I met at Burning Man 2008, brought Daniel to my attention. Daniel describes himself as "a first generation native Californian, a descendant of Oklahoma farmfolk An artist/poet dwelling on the fringes of America's consumerist culture." I call him a good soul.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Portland, Oregon. *The Cenacle* was around for some years before I met her, and I am proud of the issues published back then. That said, there are hours since, when we sit working out the next issue, sometimes deep into graphic composition in Photoshop, that I would call most dear and precious of all.

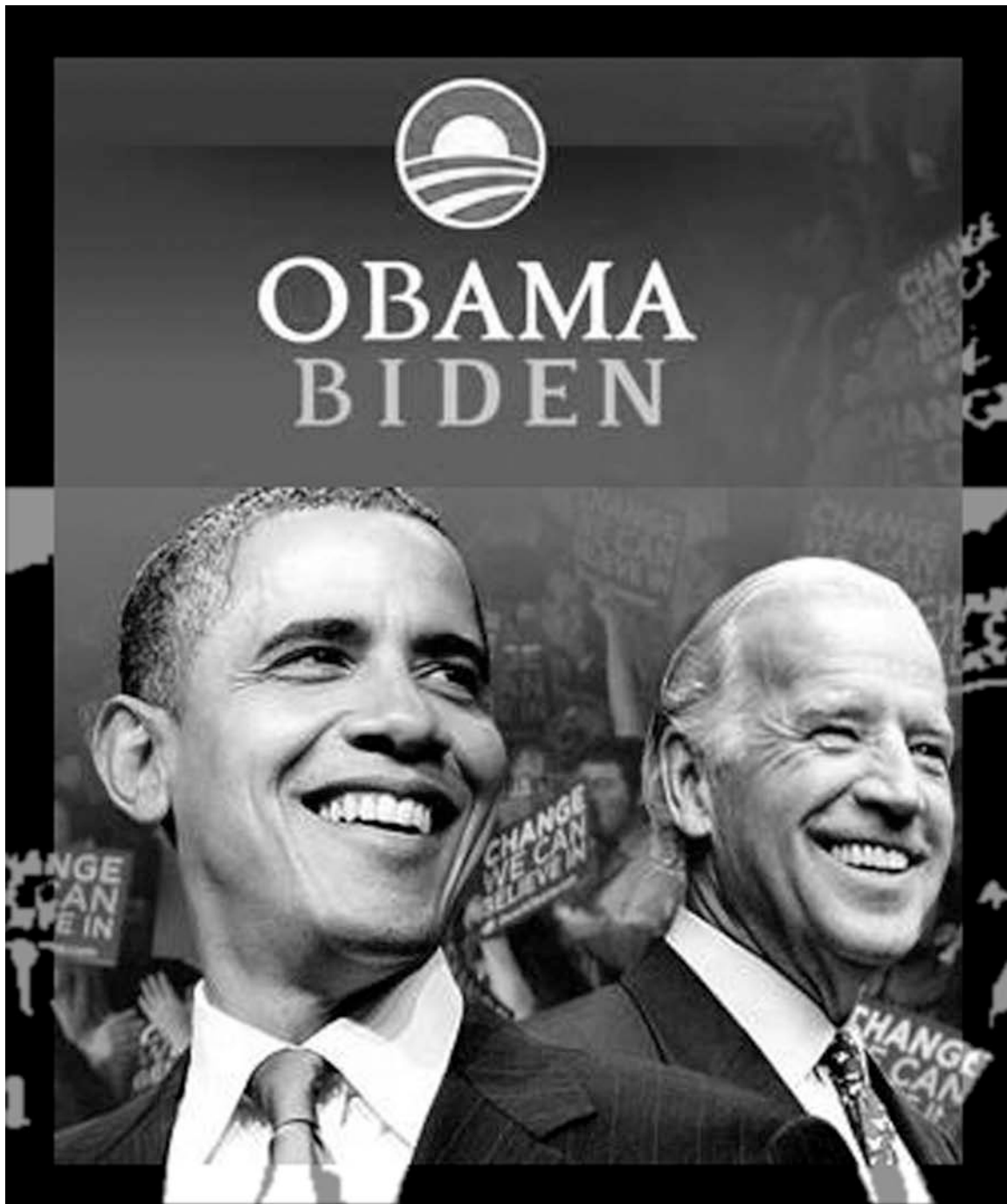
Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Portland, Oregon. Such a contrast from the last issue several months ago, when I was newly jobless and upon the cusp of a summer's despair. This issue bears that despair in some pages mine, but also the celebration in recent weeks too. They both matter; preferring the latter.

Victor Vanek lives in The Dalles, Oregon. His photography last appeared in *Cenacle* | 65 | June 2008. We have been friends for some years, but working together artistically is a new twist in our relationship. Hoping his photography will appear in many more issues.



*"Press and keep pressing.
If you can't fly, run;
if you can't run, walk;
if you can't walk—CRAWL."*

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 1956.



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